The Sin-Eater And Other Tales And Episodes

Fiona MacLeod

Fred C. Hayes

CARNATION SERIES

The Sin-Eater

And Other Tales and Episodes

BY

FIONA MACLEOD

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TO

GEORGE MEREDITH

IN GRATITUDE AND HOMAGE: AND BECAUSE
HE IS PRINCE OF CELTDOM

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(FROM IONA)

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FROM IONA.

To George Meredith.

Here, where the sound of the falling wave is faintly ~~*lake*~~ *heard, and rather as in the spiral chamber of a shell than in the windy open, I write these few dedicatory words. I am alone here, betwixt sea and sky, for there is no other living thing for the seeing on this bouldered height of Dûn-I except a single blue shadow that dreams slowly athwart the hillside. The bleating of lambs and ewes, the lowing of kine, these come up from the* Machar *that lies between the west slopes and the shoreless sea to the west; these ascend as the very smoke of sound. All round the island there is a continuous breathing: deeper and more prolonged on the west, where the sea-heart is; but audible everywhere. This moment, the seals on Soa are putting their breasts against the running tide: for I see a flashing of fins here and there in patches at the north end of the Sound, and already from the ruddy granite shores of the Ross there is a congregation of seafowl,— gannets and guillemots, skuas and herring-gulls, the long-necked northern-diver, the tern, the cormorant.*

In this sunflood, the waters of the Sound dance their blue bodies and swirl their flashing white hair o' foam; and, as I look, they seem to me like children of the wind and the sunshine, leaping and running in these sungold pastures, with a laughter as sweet against the ears as the voices of children at play.

The joy of life vibrates everywhere. Yet the Weaver doth not sleep, but only dreams. He loves the sun-drowned shadows. They are invisible thus, but they are there, in the sunlight itself. Sure, they may be heard: as, an hour ago, when on my way hither by the Stairway of the Kings — for so sometimes they call here the ancient stones of the mouldered princes of long ago — I heard a mother moaning because of the son that had had to go over-sea and leave her in her old age; and heard also a child sobbing, because of the sorrow of childhood, — that sorrow so mysterious, so unfathomable, so for ever incommunicable.

To the little one I spoke. But all she would say, looking up through dark, tear-wet eyes, already filled with the shadow of the burden of woman, was: "Ha mee dūvăchŭs."

"Tha mi Dubhachas! — *I have the gloom.*"

Ah, that saying! How often I have heard it in the remote Isles! "The Gloom." It is not grief, nor any common sorrow, nor that deep despondency of weariness that comes of accomplished things, too soon, too literally fulfilled. But it is akin to each of these,

and involves each. It is, rather, the unconscious knowledge of the lamentation of a race, the unknowing surety of an inheritance of woe.

On the lips of the children of what people, save in the last despoiled sanctuaries of the Gael, could be heard these all too significant sayings: "Tha mi Dubhachas *— I have the gloom;*" "Ma tha sìn an Dàn — *If that be ordained, If it be Destiny*"? *Never shall I forget the lisping of this phrase, — common from The Seven Hunters, that are the extreme of the Hebrid Isles, to the Rhinns of Islay, and from the Ord of Sutherland to the Mull of Cantyre, — never shall I forget the lisping of this phrase in the mouth of a little birdikin of a lass, not more than three years old, — a phrase caught, no doubt, as the jay catches the storm-note of the missel-thrush, but not the less significant, not the less piteous:* "Ma tha sìn an Dàn — *If it be Destiny!*"

This is so. And yet not a stone's throw from where I lie, half hidden beneath an overhanging rock, is a Pool of Healing. To this small, black-brown tarn, pilgrims of every generation, for hundreds upon hundreds of years, have come. Solitary, these: not only because the pilgrim to the Fount of Eternal Youth — which, as all Gaeldom knows, is beneath this tarn on Dûn-I of Iona — must fare hither alone, and at dawn, so as to touch the healing water the moment the first sunray quickens it, — but solitary, also, because those who go in quest of this Fount of Youth are the dream-

ers and the Children of Dream, and these are not many, and few come to this lonely place. Yet, an Isle of Dream, Iona is, indeed. Here the last sun-worshippers bowed before the Rising of God; here Columba and his hymning priests laboured and brooded; and here Oran dreamed beneath the monkish cowl that pagan dream of his. Here, too, the eyes of Fionn and Oisìn, and of many another of the heroic men and women of the Fiànna, lingered often; here the Pict and the Celt bowed beneath the yoke of the Norse pirate, who, too, left his dreams, or rather his strangely beautiful soul-rainbows, as a heritage to the stricken; here, for century after century, the Gael has lived, suffered, joyed, dreamed his impossible, beautiful dream; as here, now, he still lives, still suffers patiently, still dreams, and through all and over all, broods deep against the mystery of things. He is an elemental, among the elemental forces. They *have the voices of wind and sea;* he *has these words of the soul of the Celtic race:* "Tha mi Dubhachas — Ma tha sìn an Dàn." *It is because the Fount of Youth that is upon Dûn-I of Iona is not the only Wellspring of Peace, that the Gael can front* "an Dàn" *as he does, and can endure his* "Dubhachas." *Who knows where its tributaries are? They may be in your heart, or in mine, and in a myriad others.*

I would that the birds of Angus Ogue might, for once, be changed, not into the kisses of love, but into

doves of peace; that they might fly forth into the green world, and be nested there awhile, crooning their incommunicable song that would yet bring joy and hope.

Why, you may think, do I write these things? It is because I wish to say to you, and to all who may read this book, that in what I have said lies the Secret of the Gael. The beauty of the World, the pathos of Life, the gloom, the fatalism, the spiritual glamour — it is out of these, the inheritance of the Gael, that I have wrought these tales.

Well I know that they do not give "a rounded and complete portrait of the Celt." It is more than likely that I could not do so if I tried, but I have not tried; not even to give "a rounded and complete portrait" of the Gael, who is to the Celtic race what the Franco-Breton is to the French, a creature not without blitheness and humour, laughter-loving, indolent, steadfast, gentle, fierce, but above all attuned to elemental passions, to the poetry of nature, and wrought in every nerve and fibre by the gloom and mystery of his environment.

Elsewhere I may give such delineation as I can, and is within my own knowledge, of the manysidedness of the Celt, and even of the insular Gael. But in this book, as in Pharais *and* The Mountain Lovers, *I give the life of the Gael in what is, to me, in accord with my own observation and experience, its most poignant characteristics, — that is, of course, in certain circumstances,*

in a particular environment. Almost needless to say, I do not present such mere sport of Destiny as Neil Ross, the Sin-Eater, or Neil MacCodrum ("The Dànnan-Ròn") as typical Gaels, any more than I would have Gloom Achanna, whose sombre personality colours the three tales of the fourth section, accepted as typical of the perverted Celt. They are true in their degree; that is all. But I do aver that Alasdair Achanna, the Anointed Man; and the fishermen of Iona of whom I speak; and Ian Mòr of the Hills; and others akin to these, — are typical. This, obviously, may be said without affirming that they are "rounded and complete" types of the Gaelic Celt. Of course they are nothing of the kind. This, also, may be said: that they are not typical to the exclusion of other types. Could Ian Mòr be common anywhere? Are there so many poet-dreamers? Could Ethlenn Stuart or Eilidh McIan be met with in each strath, on every hillside? Is the beautiful and one inevitable phrase to be found on any lips? All men speak of love; but only you have said the supreme thing of the passion of love; namely, that Passion is noble strength on fire. You only have said this. It is individually characteristic; it is racially typical; and yet a thousand poets have come and gone, a million million hearts have beat to this chord, and the phrase has waited, isolate, for you. Is it therefore not indicative? Whether with phrase, or the lilt of a free music, or with man, — there should be

no saying that he or it does not exist because invisible through the dust of the common highway.

It must not be forgotten that "the Celtic Fringe" is of divers colours. The Armorican, the Cymric, the Gael of Ireland, and the Scottish Gael are of the same stock, but are not the same people. Even the crofter of Donegal or the fisherman of Clare is no more than an older or younger brother of the Hebridean or the Highlander; certainly they are not twins, of an indistinguishable likeness. Some of my critics, heedless of the complex conditions which differentiate the Irish and the Scottish Celt, complain of the Celtic gloom that dusks the life of the men and women I have tried to draw. That may be just. I wish merely to say that I have not striven to depict the blither Irish Celt. I have sought mainly to express something of what I have seen as paramount, something of "the Celtic Gloom" which, to many Gaels if not to all, is so distinctive in the remote life of a doomed and passing race. Possibly, though of course it is unlikely they should write save out of fulness of knowledge, those of my critics to whom I allude have dwelt for years among these distant isles, intimate with the speech and mind and daily life and veiled, secretive inner nature of the men and women who inhabit them. I cannot judge, for I do not profess to know every glen in the Highlands, or to have set foot on every one of the Thousand Isles.

A doomed and passing race. Yes, but not wholly so. The Celt has at last reached his horizon. There is no shore beyond. He knows it. This has been the burden of his song since Malvina led the blind Oisîn to his grave by the sea. "Even the Children of Light must go down into darkness." But this apparition of a passing race is no more than the fulfilment of a glorious resurrection before our very eyes. For the genius of the Celtic race stands out now with averted torch, and the light of it is a glory before the eyes, and the flame of it is blown into the hearts of the mightier conquering people. The Celt falls, but his spirit rises in the heart and the brain of the Anglo-Celtic peoples, with whom are the destinies of the generations to come.

Well, this is a far cry, from one small voice on the hill-slope of Dûn-I of Iona, to the clarion-call of the future! But, sure, even in this Isle of Joy, as it seems to-day in this dazzle of golden light and splashing wave, there is all the gloom and all the mystery which lived in the minds of the old seers and bards. Yonder, where that thin spray quivers against the thyme-set cliff, is the Spouting Cave, where to this day the Mar-Tarbh, *dread creature of the sea, swims at the full of the tide. Beyond, out of sight behind these heights, is Port-na-Churaich, where, a thousand years ago, Columba landed in his coracle. Here, eastward, is the*

landing-place for the dead of old, brought hence, out of Christendom, for sacred burial in the Isle of the Saints. All the story of Albyn is here. Iona is the microcosm of Gaeldom.

Last night, about the hour of the sun's going, I lay upon the heights near the Cave, overlooking the Machar, *— the sandy, rock-frontiered plain of duneland on the west side of Iona, exposed to the Atlantic. There was neither man nor beast, no living thing to see, save one solitary human creature. This brown, bent, aged man toiled at kelp-burning. I watched the smoke till it merged into the sea-mist that came creeping swiftly out of the north, and down from Dûn-I eastward. At last nothing was visible. The mist shrouded everything. I could hear the dull, rhythmic beat of the waves. That was all. No sound, nothing visible.*

It was, or seemed, a long while before a rapid thud-thud trampled the heavy air. Then I heard the rush, the stamping and neighing, of some young mares, pasturing there, as they raced to and fro, bewildered or mayhap only in play. A glimpse I caught of three, with flying manes and tails; the others were blurred shadows only. A swirl, and the mist disclosed them: a swirl, and the mist enfolded them again. Then, silence once more.

All at once, though not for a long time thereafter, the mist rose and drifted seaward.

All was as before. The Kelp-Burner still stood,

straking the smouldering seaweed. Above him a column ascended, bluely spiral, dusked with gloom of shadow.

The Kelp-Burner: who is he but the Gael of the Isles? Who but the Celt in his sorrow? The mist falls and the mist rises. He is there all the same, behind it, part of it: and the column of smoke is the incense out of his longing heart that desires Heaven and Earth, and is dowered only with poverty and pain, hunger and weariness, a little isle of the seas, a great hope, and the love of love.

In that mist I had dreamed a dream. When I woke, these strange, unfamiliar words were upon my lips: Am Dia beo, an Domhan basacha,' an Diomhair Cinne'-Daonna.

Am Dia beo, an Domhan basacha, an Diomhair Cinne'-Daonna: "*The Living God, the dying World, and the mysterious Race of Men.*"

I know not what obscure and remote ancestral memory rose, there, to the surface; but I imagined for a moment that the Spirit of the race, and not a solitary human being, found utterance in this so typical saying. It is the sense of an abiding spiritual Presence, of a waning, a perishing World, and of the mystery and incommunicable destiny of Man, which distinguishes the ethical life of the Celt.

"*The Three Powers,*" *I murmured, as I rose to leave*

the place where I was. "*These are the three powers: the Living God, the evanescent World, and Man. And somewhere in the darkness,* — an Dàn, *Destiny.*"

Yes, Ma tha sìn an Dàn; *that is where we come to again. It is Destiny, then, that is the Protagonist in the Celtic Drama,* — *the most moving, the most poignant of all that make up the too tragic Tragi-Comedy of human life. And it is Destiny, that sombre Demogorgon of the Gael, whose boding breath, whose menace, whose shadow, glooms so much of the remote life I know, and hence glooms also this book of interpretations,* — *for pages of life must either be interpretative or merely documentary, and these following pages have for the most part been written as by one who repeats, with curious insistence, a haunting, familiar, yet ever wild and remote air, whose obscure meanings he would fain reiterate, interpret.*

You, of all living writers, can best understand this; for in you the Celtic genius burns a pure flame. True, the Cymric blood that is in you moves to a more lightsome measure than that of the Scottish Gael, and the accidents of temperament and life have combined to make you a writer for great peoples rather than for a people. But though England appropriate you as her son, and all the Anglo-Celtic peoples are the heritors of your genius, we claim your brain. Now, we are a scattered band. The Breton's eyes are slowly turning

from the sea, and slowly his ears are forgetting the whisper of the wind around Menhir and Dolmen. The Cornishman has lost his language, and there is now no bond between him and his ancient kin. The Manxman has ever been the mere yeoman of the Celtic chivalry; but even his rude dialect perishes year by year. In Wales, a great tradition survives; in Ireland, a supreme tradition fades through sunset-hued horizons to the edge o' dark; in Celtic Scotland, a passionate regret, a despairing love and longing, narrows yearly before a bastard utilitarianism which is almost as great a curse to our despoiled land as Calvinistic theology has been and is.

But with you, and others not less enthusiastic if less brilliant, we need not despair. "The Englishman may trample down the heather," say the shepherds of Argyll, "but he cannot trample down the wind."

I

THE SIN-EATER.

THE NINTH WAVE.

THE JUDGMENT O' GOD.

The Sin-Eater.

SIN.

Taste this bread, this substance ; tell me
Is it bread or flesh ?

[*The* SENSES *approach.*

THE SMELL.

Its smell
Is the smell of bread.

SIN.

Touch, come. Why tremble ?
Say what 's this thou touchest ?

THE TOUCH.

Bread.

SIN.

Sight, declare what thou discernest
In this object.

THE SIGHT.

Bread alone.

CALDERON : *Los Encantos de la Culpa.*

A WET wind out of the south mazed and moaned through the sea-mist that hung over the Ross. In all the bays and creeks was a contin-

uous weary lapping of water. There was no other sound anywhere.

Thus was it at daybreak; it was thus at noon; thus was it now in the darkening of the day. A confused thrusting and falling of sounds through the silence betokened the hour of the setting. Curlews wailed in the mist; on the seething limpet-covered rocks the skuas and terns screamed, or uttered hoarse rasping cries. Ever and again the prolonged note of the oyster-catcher shrilled against the air, as an echo flying blindly along a blank wall of cliff. Out of weedy places, wherein the tide sobbed with long gurgling moans, came at intervals the barking of a seal.

Inland by the hamlet of Contullich, there is a reedy tarn called the Loch-a-chaoruinn.[1] By the shores of this mournful water a man moved. It was a slow, weary walk that of the man Neil Ross. He had come from Duninch, thirty miles to the eastward, and had not rested foot, nor eaten, nor had word of man or woman since his going west an hour after dawn.

[1] *Contullich* i. e., Ceann-nan-tulaich, "the end of the hillocks." *Loch-a-chaoruinn* means the loch of the rowan-trees.

At the bend of the loch nearest the clachan he came upon an old woman carrying peat. To his reiterated question as to where he was, and if the tarn were Feur-Lochan above Fionnaphort, that is, on the strait of Iona on the west side of the Ross of Mull, she did not at first make any answer. The rain trickled down her withered brown face, over which the thin grey locks hung limply. It was only in the deep-set eyes that the flame of life still glimmered, though that dimly.

The man had used the English when first he spoke, but as though mechanically. Supposing that he had not been understood, he repeated his question in the Gaelic.

After a minute's silence the old woman answered in the native tongue, but only to put a question in return.

"I am thinking it is a long time since you have been in Iona?"

The man stirred uneasily.

"And why is that, mother?" he asked, in a weak voice hoarse with damp and fatigue; "how is it you will be knowing that I have been in Iona at all?"

"Because I knew your kith and kin there, Neil Ross."

"I have not been hearing that name, mother, for many a long year. And as for the old face o' you, it is unbeknown to me."

"I was at the naming of you, for all that. Well do I remember the day that Silis Macallum gave you birth; and I was at the house on the croft of Ballyrona when Murtagh Ross, that was your father, laughed. It was an ill laughing, that."

"I am knowing it. The curse of God on him!"

"'T is not the first, nor the last, though the grass is on his head three years agone now."

"You that know who I am will be knowing that I have no kith or kin now on Iona?"

"Ay, they are all under grey stone or running wave. Donald your brother, and Murtagh your next brother, and little Silis, and your mother Silis herself and your two brothers of your father, Angus and Ian Macallum, and your father Murtagh Ross, and his lawful childless wife Dionaid, and his sister Anna, one and all they lie beneath the green wave or in the brown mould. It is said there is a curse upon all who live at Ballyrona. The owl builds now in the

rafters, and it is the big sea-rat that runs across the fireless hearth."

"It is there I am going."

"The foolishness is on you, Neil Ross."

"Now it is that I am knowing who you are. It is old Sheen Macarthur I am speaking to."

"*Tha mise* — it is I."

"And you will be alone now, too, I am thinking, Sheen?"

"I am alone. God took my three boys at the one fishing ten years ago, and before there was moonrise in the blackness of my heart my man went. It was after the drowning of Anndra that my croft was taken from me. Then I crossed the Sound, and shared with my widow sister, Elsie McVurie, till *she* went; and then the two cows had to go; and I had no rent; and was old."

In the silence that followed, the rain dribbled from the sodden bracken and dripping loneroid. Big tears rolled slowly down the deep lines on the face of Sheen. Once there was a sob in her throat, but she put her shaking hand to it, and it was still.

Neil Ross shifted from foot to foot. The ooze in that marshy place squelched with each rest-

less movement he made. Beyond them a plover wheeled a blurred splatch in the mist, crying its mournful cry over and over and over.

It was a pitiful thing to hear; ah, bitter loneliness, bitter patience of poor old women. That he knew well. But he was too weary, and his heart was nigh full of its own burthen. The words could not come to his lips. But at last he spoke.

"*Tha mo chridhe goirt*," he said with tears in his voice, as he put his hand on her bent shoulder; "my heart is sore."

She put up her old face against his.

"'*S tha e ruidhinn mo chridhe*," she whispered, — "it is touching my heart you are."

After that they walked on slowly through the dripping mist, each dumb and brooding deep.

"Where will you be staying this night?" asked Sheen suddenly, when they had traversed a wide boggy stretch of land; adding, as by an afterthought — "ah, it is asking you were if the tarn there were Feur-Lochan. No; it is Loch-a-chaoruinn, and the clachan that is near is Contullich."

"Which way?"

"Yonder; to the right."

"And you are not going there?"

"No. I am going to the steading of Andrew Blair. Maybe you are for knowing it? It is called Le-Baile-na-Chlais-nambuidheag."[1]

"I do not remember. But it is remembering a Blair I am. He was Adam the son of Adam the son of Robert. He and my father did many an ill deed together."

"Ay, to the Stones be it said. Sure, now, there was even till this weary day no man or woman who had a good word for Adam Blair."

"And why that — why till this day?"

"It is not yet the third hour since he went into the silence."

Neil Ross uttered a sound like a stifled curse. For a time he trudged wearily on.

"Then I am too late," he said at last, but as though speaking to himself. "I had hoped to see him face to face again, and curse him between the eyes. It was he who made Murtagh Ross break his troth to my mother, and marry that other woman, barren at that, God be praised! And they say ill of him, do they?"

[1] The farm in the hollow of the yellow flowers.

"Ay, it is evil that is upon him. This crime and that, God knows: and the shadow of murder on his brow and in his eyes. Well, well, 'tis ill to be speaking of a man in corpse, and that near by. 'T is Himself only that knows, Neil Ross."

"Maybe ay, and maybe no. But where is it that I can be sleeping this night, Sheen Macarthur?"

"They will not be taking a stranger at the farm this night of the nights, I am thinking. There is no place else, for seven miles yet, when there is the clachan before you will be coming to Fionnaphort. There is the warm byre, Neil my man, or if you can bide by my peats you may rest and welcome, though there is no bed for you, and no food either save some of the porridge that is over."

"And that will do well enough for me, Sheen, and Himself bless you for it."

And so it was.

After old Sheen Macarthur had given the wayfarer food — poor food at that, but welcome to one nigh starved, and for the heartsome way it was given, and because of the thanks to God

that was upon it before even spoon was lifted — she told him a lie. It was the good lie of tender love.

"Sure now, after all, Neil my man," she said, "it is sleeping at the farm I ought to be, for Maisie Macdonald, the wise-woman, will be sitting by the corpse, and there will be none to keep her company. It is there I must be going, and if I am weary, there is a good bed for me just beyond the dead-board, which I am not minding at all. So if it is tired you are sitting by the peats, lie down on my bed there, and have the sleep, and God be with you."

With that she went, and soundlessly, for Neil Ross was already asleep, where he sat on an upturned *claar* with his elbows on his knees and his flame-lit face in his hands.

The rain had ceased; but the mist still hung over the land, though in thin veils now, and these slowly drifting seaward. Sheen stepped wearily along the stony path that led from her bothy to the farm-house. She stood still once, the fear upon her, for she saw three or four blurred yellow gleams moving beyond her eastward along the dyke. She knew what they were, — the corpse-lights that on the night of

death go between the bier and the place of burial. More than once she had seen them before the last hour, and by that token had known the end to be near.

Good Catholic that she was, she crossed herself and took heart. Then, muttering —

"Crois nan naoi aingeal leam
'O mhullach mo chinn
Gu craican mo bhonn," [1]

she went on her way fearlessly.

When she came to the White House she entered by the milk-shed that was between the byre and the kitchen. At the end of it was a paved place, with washing-tubs. At one of these stood a girl that served in the house; an ignorant lass called Jessie McFall, out of Oban. She was ignorant, indeed, not to know that to wash clothes with a newly dead body near by was an ill thing to do. Was it not a matter for the knowing that the corpse could hear, and might rise up in the night and clothe itself in a clean white shroud?

[1] "The cross of the nine angels be about me,
From the top of my head
To the soles of my feet."

She was still speaking to the lassie when Maisie Macdonald, the deid-watcher, opened the door of the room behind the kitchen, to see who it was that was come. The two old women nodded silently. It was not till Sheen was in the closed room, midway in which something covered with a sheet lay on a board, that any word was spoken.

"*Duit sìth mòr*, Beann Macdonald."

"And deep peace to you, too, Sheen; and to him that is there."

"*Och, ochone, mise 'n diugh;* 't is a dark hour this."

"Ay, it is bad. Will you have been hearing or seeing anything?"

"Well, as for that, I am thinking I saw lights moving betwixt here and the green place over there."

"The corpse-lights?"

"Well, it is calling them that they are."

"I *thought* they would be out. And I have been hearing the noise of the planks, — the cracking of the boards, you know, that will be used for the coffin to-morrow."

A long silence followed. The old women had seated themselves by the corpse, their

cloaks over their heads. The room was fireless, and was lit only by a tall wax death-candle, kept against the hour of the going.

At last Sheen began swaying slowly to and fro, crooning low the while. "I would not be for doing that, Sheen Macarthur," said the deid-watcher, in a low voice, but meaningly; adding, after a moment's pause, "*the mice have all left the house.*"

Sheen sat upright, a look half of terror half of awe in her eyes.

"God save the sinful soul that is hiding," she whispered.

Well she knew what Maisie meant. If the soul of the dead be a lost soul it knows its doom. The house of death is the house of sanctuary. But before the dawn that follows the death-night the soul must go forth, whosoever or whatsoever wait for it in the homeless, shelterless plains of air around and beyond. If it be well with the soul, it need have no fear; if it be not ill with the soul, it may fare forth with surety; but if it be ill with the soul, ill will the going be. Thus is it that the spirit of an evil man cannot stay and yet dare not go; and so it strives to hide itself in secret places

anywhere, in dark channels and blind walls. And the wise creatures that live near man smell the terror, and flee. Maisie repeated the saying of Sheen; then, after a silence, added: —

"Adam Blair will not lie in his grave for a year and a day, because of the sins that are upon him. And it is knowing that, they are, here. He will be the Watcher of the Dead for a year and a day."

"Ay, sure, there will be dark prints in the dawn-dew over yonder."

Once more the old women relapsed into silence. Through the night there was a sighing sound. It was not the sea, which was too far off to be heard save in a day of storm. The wind it was, that was dragging itself across the sodden moors like a wounded thing, moaning and sighing.

Out of sheer weariness, Sheen twice rocked forward from her stool, heavy with sleep. At last Maisie led her over to the niche-bed opposite, and laid her down there, and waited till the deep furrows in the face relaxed somewhat, and the thin breath laboured slow across the fallen jaw.

"Poor old woman," she muttered, heedless of her own grey hairs and greyer years; "a

bitter bad thing it is to be old, old and weary. 'T is the sorrow that; God keep the pain of it."

As for herself she did not sleep at all that night, but sat between the living and the dead, with her plaid shrouding her. Once, when Sheen gave a low, terrified scream in her sleep, she rose, and in a loud voice cried "*Sheeach-ad!* Away with you!" And with that she lifted the shroud from the dead man, and took the pennies off the eyelids, and lifted each lid; then, staring into these filmed wells, muttered an ancient incantation that would compel the soul of Adam Blair to leave the spirit of Sheen alone, and return to the cold corpse that was its coffin till the wood was ready.

The dawn came at last. Sheen slept, and Adam Blair slept a deeper sleep, and Maisie stared out of her wan weary eyes against the red and stormy flares of light that came into the sky.

When, an hour after sunrise, Sheen Macarthur reached her bothy, she found Neil Ross, heavy with slumber, upon her bed. The fire was not out, though no flame or spark was visible, but she stooped and blew at the heart

of the peats till the redness came, and once it came it grew. Having done this, she kneeled and said a rune of the morning, and after that a prayer, and then a prayer for the poor man Neil. She could pray no more because of the tears. She rose and put the meal and water into the pot, for the porridge to be ready against his awaking. One of the hens that was there came and pecked at her ragged skirt. "Poor beastie," she said, "sure, that will just be the way I am pulling at the white robe of the Mother o' God. 'T is a bit meal for you, cluckie, and for me a healing hand upon my tears — O, och, ochone, the tears, the tears!"

It was not till the third hour after sunrise of that bleak day in the winter of the winters that Neil Ross stirred and arose. He ate in silence. Once he said that he smelt the snow coming out of the north. Sheen said no word at all.

After the porridge, he took his pipe, but there was no tobacco. All that Sheen had was the pipeful she kept against the gloom of the Sabbath. It was her one solace in the long weary week. She gave him this, and held a burning peat to his mouth, and hungered over the thin, rank smoke that curled upward.

It was within half an hour of noon that, after an absence, she returned.

"Not between you and me, Neil Ross," she began abruptly, "but just for the asking, and what is beyond. Is it any money you are having upon you?"

"No."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Then how will you be getting across to Iona? It is seven long miles to Fionnaphort, and bitter cold at that, and you will be needing food, and then the ferry, the ferry across the Sound, you know."

"Ay, I know."

"What would you do for a silver piece, Neil my man?"

"You have none to give me, Sheen Macarthur, and if you had, it would not be taking it I would."

"Would you kiss a dead man for a crown-piece, — a crown-piece of five good shillings?"

Neil Ross stared. Then he sprang to his feet.

"It is Adam Blair you are meaning, woman! God curse him in death now that he is no longer in life!"

Then, shaking and trembling, he sat down again, and brooded against the dull red glow of the peats.

But, when he rose, in the last quarter before noon, his face was white.

"The dead are dead, Sheen Macarthur. They can know or do nothing. I will do it. It is willed. Yes, I am going up to the house there. And now I am going from here. God Himself has my thanks to you, and my blessing too. They will come back to you. It is not forgetting you I will be. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Neil, son of the woman that was my friend. A south wind to you! Go up by the farm. In the front of the house you will see what you will be seeing. Maisie Macdonald will be there. She will tell you what 's for the telling. There is no harm in it, sure; sure, the dead are dead. It is praying for you I will be, Neil Ross. Peace to you!"

"And to you, Sheen."

And with that the man went.

When Neil Ross reached the byres of the farm in the wide hollow, he saw two figures standing as though awaiting him, but each

separate and unseen of the other. In front of the house was a man he knew to be Andrew Blair; behind the milk-shed was a woman he guessed to be Maisie Macdonald.

It was the woman he came upon first.

"Are you the friend of Sheen Macarthur?" she asked in a whisper, as she beckoned him to the doorway.

"I am."

"I am knowing no names, or anything. And no one here will know you, I am thinking. So do the thing, and begone."

"There is no harm to it?"

"None."

"It will be a thing often done, is it not?"

"Ay, sure."

"And the evil does not abide?"

"No. The — the — person — the person takes them away, and —"

"*Them?*"

"For sure, man! Them — the sins of the corpse. He takes them away, and are you for thinking God would let the innocent suffer for the guilty? No — the person — the Sin-Eater, you know — takes them away on himself, and one by one the air of heaven washes them away

till he, the Sin-Eater, is clean and whole as before."

"But if it is a man you hate — if it is a corpse that is the corpse of one who has been a curse and a foe — if — "

"*Sst!* Be still now with your foolishness. It is only an idle saying, I am thinking. Do it, and take the money, and go. It will be hell enough for Adam Blair, miser as he was, if he is for knowing that five good shillings of his money are to go to a passing tramp, because of an old ancient silly tale."

Neil Ross laughed low at that. It was for pleasure to him.

"Hush wi' ye! Andrew Blair is waiting round there. Say that I have sent you round, as I have neither bite nor bit to give."

Turning on his heel Neil walked slowly round to the front of the house. A tall man was there, gaunt and brown, with hairless face and lank brown hair, but with eyes cold and grey as the sea.

"Good day to you an' good faring. Will you be passing this way to anywhere?"

"Health to you. I am a stranger here. It is on my way to Iona I am. But I have the

hunger upon me. There is not a brown bit in my pocket. I asked at the door there, near the byres. The woman told me she could give me nothing — not a penny even, worse luck, — nor, for that, a drink of warm milk. 'T is a sore land this."

"You have the Gaelic of the Isles. Is it from Iona you are?"

"It is from the Isles of the West I come."

"From Tiree? — from Coll?"

"No."

"From the Long Island — or from Uist — or maybe from Benbecula?"

"No."

"Oh well, sure it is no matter to me. But may I be asking your name?"

"Macallum."

"Do you know there is a death here, Macallum?"

"If I did n't, I would know it now, because of what lies yonder."

Mechanically, Andrew Blair looked round. As he knew, a rough bier was there, that was made of a dead-board laid upon three milking-stools. Beside it was a *claar*, a small tub to hold potatoes. On the bier was a corpse,

covered with a canvas sheeting that looked like a sail.

"He was a worthy man, my father," began the son of the dead man, slowly; "but he had his faults, like all of us. I might even be saying that he had his sins, to the Stones be it said. You will be knowing, Macallum, what is thought among the folk — that a stranger, passing by, may take away the sins of the dead, and that too without any hurt whatever — any hurt whatever."

"Ay, sure."

"And you will be knowing what is done?"

"Ay."

"With the Bread — and the Water — "

"Ay."

"It is a small thing to do. It is a Christian thing. I would be doing it myself, and that gladly; but the — the — passer-by who — "

"It is talking of the Sin-Eater you are?"

"Yes, yes, for sure. The Sin-Eater as he is called — and a good Christian act it is, for all that the ministers and the priests make a frowning at it — the Sin-Eater must be a stranger. He must be a stranger, and should know nothing of the dead man, above all bear him no grudge."

At that, Neil Ross's eyes lightened for a moment.

"And why that?"

"Who knows? I have heard this, and I have heard that. If the Sin-Eater was hating the dead man he could take the sins and fling them into the sea and they would be changed into demons of the air that would harry the flying soul till Judgment-Day."

"And how would that thing be done?"

The man spake with flashing eyes and parted lips, the breath coming swift. Andrew Blair looked at him suspiciously, and hesitated, before in a cold voice he spoke again.

"That is all folly, I am thinking, Macallum. Maybe it is all folly, the whole of it. But see here, I have no time to be talking with you. If you will take the bread and the water you shall have a good meal if you want it, and — and — yes, look you, my man, I will be giving you a shilling too, for luck."

"I will have no meal in this house, Anndra Mhic Adam; nor will I do this thing unless you will be giving me two silver half-crowns. That is the sum I must have, or no other."

"Two half-crowns! Why, man, for one half-crown — "

"Then be eating the sins o' your father yourself, Andrew Blair! It is going I am."

"Stop, man! Stop, Macallum. See here: I will be giving you what you ask."

"So be it. Is the — are you ready?"

"Ay, come this way."

With that the two men turned, and moved slowly towards the bier.

In the doorway of the house stood a man and two women; farther in, a woman; and at the window to the left the serving-wench, Jessie McFall, and two men of the farm. Of those in the doorway, the man was Peter, the half-witted youngest brother of Andrew Blair; the taller and older woman was Catreen, the widow of Adam the second brother; and the thin slight woman, with staring eyes and drooping mouth, was Muireall, the wife of Andrew. The old woman, behind these, was Maisie Macdonald.

Andrew Blair stooped and took a saucer out of the *claar*. This he put upon the covered breast of the corpse. He stooped again, and brought forth a thick square piece of new-made bread. That also he placed upon the breast of the corpse. Then he stooped again, and with

that he emptied a spoonful of salt alongside the bread.

"I must see the corpse," said Neil Ross, simply.

"It is not needful, Macallum."

"I must be seeing the corpse, I tell you,— and for that, too, the bread and the water should be on the naked breast."

"No, no, man, it—"

But here a voice, that of Maisie the wise-woman, came upon them, saying that the man was right, and that the eating of the sins should be done in that way and no other.

With an ill grace the son of the dead man drew back the sheeting. Beneath it the corpse was in a clean white shirt, a death-gown long ago prepared, that covered him from his neck to his feet, and left only the dusky, yellowish face exposed.

While Andrew Blair unfastened the shirt, and placed the saucer and the bread and the salt on the breast, the man beside him stood staring fixedly on the frozen features of the corpse. The new laird had to speak to him twice before he heard.

"I am ready. And you, now? What is it

you are muttering over against the lips of the dead?"

"It is giving him a message I am. There is no harm in that, sure?"

"Keep to your own folk, Macallum. You are from the West you say, and we are from the North. There can be no messages between you and a Blair of Strathmore, no messages for *you* to be giving."

"He that lies here knows well the man to whom I am sending a message—" and at this response Andrew Blair scowled darkly. He would fain have sent the man about his business, but he feared he might get no other.

"It is thinking I am that you are not a Macallum at all. I know all of that name in Mull, Iona, Skye, and the near isles. What will the name of your naming be, and of your father, and of his place?"

Whether he really wanted an answer, or whether he sought only to divert the man from his procrastination, his question had a satisfactory result.

"Well, now, it's ready I am, Anndra Mhic Adam."

With that, Andrew Blair stooped once more,

and from the *claar* brought a small jug of water. From this he filled the saucer.

"You know what to say and what to do, Macallum."

There was not one there who did not have a shortened breath because of the mystery that was now before them, and the fearfulness of it. Neil Ross drew himself up, erect, stiff, with white, drawn face. All who waited, save Andrew Blair, thought that the moving of his lips was because of the prayer that was slipping upon them, like the last lapsing of the ebb-tide. But Blair was watching him closely, and knew that it was no prayer which stole out against the blank air that was around the dead.

Slowly Neil Ross extended his right arm. He took a pinch of the salt and put it in the saucer, then took another pinch and sprinkled it upon the bread. His hand shook for a moment as he touched the saucer. But there was no shaking as he raised it towards his lips, or when he held it before him when he spoke.

"With this water that has salt in it, and has lain on thy corpse, O Adam Mhic Anndra Mhic Adam Mòr, I drink away all the evil that is upon thee" — there was throbbing silence while

he paused — "and may it be upon me, and not upon thee, if with this water it cannot flow away."

Thereupon he raised the saucer and passed it thrice round the head of the corpse sunways, and having done this, lifted it to his lips and drank as much as his mouth would hold. Thereafter he poured the remnant over his left hand, and let it trickle to the ground. Then he took the piece of bread. Thrice, too, he passed it round the head of the corpse sunways.

He turned and looked at the man by his side, then at the others who watched him with beating hearts.

With a loud clear voice he took the sins.

"*Thoir dhomh do ciontachd, O Adam Mhic Anndra Mhic Adam Mòr!* Give me thy sins to take away from thee! Lo, now, as I stand here, I break this bread that has lain on thee in corpse, and I am eating it, I am, and in that eating I take upon me the sins of thee, O man that was alive and is now white with the stillness!"

Thereupon Neil Ross broke the bread and ate of it, and took upon himself the sins of Adam Blair that was dead. It was a bitter swallowing, that. The remainder of the bread he crumbled

in his hand, and threw it on the ground, and trod upon it. Andrew Blair gave a sigh of relief. His cold eyes lightened with malice.

"Be off with you, now, Macallum. We are wanting no tramps at the farm here, and perhaps you had better not be trying to get work this side Iona, for it is known as the Sin-Eater you will be, and that won't be for the helping, I am thinking! There: there are the two half-crowns for you — and may they bring you no harm, you that are *Scapegoat* now!"

The Sin-Eater turned at that, and stared like a hill-bull. *Scapegoat!* Ay, that's what he was. Sin-Eater, scapegoat! Was he not, too, another Judas, to have sold for silver that which was not for the selling? No, no, for sure Maisie Macdonald could tell him the rune that would serve for the easing of this burden. He would soon be quit of it.

Slowly he took the money, turned it over, and put it in his pocket.

"I am going, Andrew Blair," he said quietly; "I am going, now. I will not say to him that is there in the silence, *A chuid do Pharas da!* — nor will I say to you, *Gu'n gleidheadh Dia thu*, — nor will I say to this dwelling that is the

home of thee and thine, *Gu'n beannaicheadh Dia an tigh!*"[1]

Here there was a pause. All listened. Andrew Blair shifted uneasily, the furtive eyes of him going this way and that like a ferret in the grass.

"But, Andrew Blair, I will say this; when you fare abroad, *Droch caoidh ort!* and when you go upon the water, *Gaoth gun direadh ort!* Ay, ay, Anndra Mhic Adam, *Dia ad aghaidh 's ad aodann — agus bas dunach ort! Dhonas 's dholas ort, agus leat-sa!*"[2]

The bitterness of these words was like snow in June upon all there. They stood amazed. None spoke. No one moved.

Neil Ross turned upon his heel, and with a bright light in his eyes walked away from the dead

[1] (1) *A chuid do Pharas da!* "His share of heaven be his." (2) *Gu'n gleidheadh Dia thu!* "May God preserve you." (3) *Gu'n beannaicheadh Dia an tigh!* "God's blessing on this house."

[2] (1) *Droch caoidh ort!* "May a fatal accident happen to you" (lit. "Bad moan on you"). (2) *Gaoth gun direadh ort!* "May you drift to your drowning" (lit. "Wind without direction on you"). (3) *Dia ad aghaidh, etc!* "God against thee and in thy face — and may a death of woe be yours. Evil and sorrow to thee and thine!"

and the living. He went by the byres, whence he had come. Andrew Blair remained where he was, now glooming at the corpse, now biting his nails and staring at the damp sods at his feet.

When Neil reached the end of the milk-shed he saw Maisie Macdonald there, waiting.

"These were ill sayings of yours, Neil Ross," she said in a low voice, so that she might not be overheard from the house.

"So, it is knowing me you are."

"Sheen Macarthur told me."

"I have good cause."

"That is a true word. I know it."

"Tell me this thing. What is the rune that is said for the throwing into the sea of the sins of the dead? See here, Maisie Macdonald. There is no money of that man that I would carry a mile with me. Here it is. It is yours, if you will tell me that rune."

Maisie took the money hesitatingly. Then, stooping, she said slowly the few lines of the old, old rune.

"Will you be remembering that?"

"It is not forgetting it I will be, Maisie."

"Wait a moment. There is some warm milk here."

With that she went, and then, from within, beckoned to him to enter.

"There is no one here, Neil Ross. Drink the milk."

He drank: and while he did so she drew a leather pouch from some hidden place in her dress.

"And now I have this to give you."

She counted out ten pennies and two farthings.

"It is all the coppers I have. You are welcome to them. Take them, friend of my friend. They will give you the food you need, and the ferry across the Sound."

"I will do that, Maisie Macdonald, and thanks to you. It is not forgetting it I will be, nor you, good woman. And now, tell me: Is it safe that I am? He called me a 'scapegoat,' he, Andrew Blair! Can evil touch me between this and the sea?"

"You must go to the place where the evil was done to you and yours; and that, I know, is on the west side of Iona. Go, and God preserve you. But here, too, is a *sian* that will be for the safety."

Thereupon with swift mutterings she said

this charm: an old, familiar *sian* against Sudden Harm: —

Sian a chuir Moire air Mac ort,
Sian ro' marbhadh, sian ro' lot ort,
Sian eadar a' chlioch 's a' ghlun,
Sian nan Tri ann an aon ort,
O mhullach do chinn gu bonn do chois ort:
Sian seachd eadar a h-aon ort,
Sian seachd eadar a dha ort,
Sian seachd eadar a tri ort,
Sian seachd eadar a ceithir ort,
Sian seachd eadar a coig ort,
Sian seachd eadar a sia ort,
Sian seachd paidir nan seach paidir dol deiseil ri diugh narach ort, ga do ghleidheadh bho bheud 's bho mhi-thapadh!

Scarcely had she finished before she heard heavy steps approaching.

"Away with you," she whispered; repeating in a loud angry tone, "Away with you! *Seachad! Seachad!*"

And with that Neil Ross slipped from the milk-shed and crossed the yard, and was behind the byres, before Andrew Blair, with sullen mien and swift wild eyes, strode from the house.

It was with a grim smile on his face that Neil tramped down the wet heather till he reached

the high road, and fared thence as through a marsh because of the rains there had been.

For the first mile he thought of the angry mind of the dead man, bitter at paying of the silver. For the second mile he thought of the evil that had been wrought for him and his. For the third mile he pondered over all that he had heard, and done, and taken upon him that day.

Then he sat down upon a broken granite-heap by the way, and brooded deep, till one hour went, and then another, and the third was upon him.

A man driving two calves came towards him out of the west. He did not hear or see. The man stopped, spoke again. Neil gave no answer. The drover shrugged his shoulders, hesitated, and walked slowly on, often looking back.

An hour later a shepherd came by the way he himself had tramped. He was a tall, gaunt man with a squint. The small pale-blue eyes glittered out of a mass of red hair that almost covered his face. He stood still opposite Neil, and leaned on his *cromak*.

"*Latha math leat*," he said at last, "I wish you good day."

Neil glanced at him, but did not speak.

"What is your name, for I seem to know you?"

But Neil had already forgotten him. The shepherd took out his snuff-mull, helped himself, and handed the mull to the lonely wayfarer. Neil mechanically helped himself.

"*Am bheil thu 'dol do Fhionphort?*" cried the shepherd again, "are you going to Fionnaphort?"

"*Tha mise 'dol a dh' I-challum-chille,*" Neil answered in a low, weary voice, and as a man adream, "I am on my way to Iona."

"I am thinking I know now who you are. You are the man Macallum."

Neil looked, but did not speak. His eyes dreamed against what the other could not see or know. The shepherd called angrily to his dogs to keep the sheep from straying; then, with a resentful air, turned to his victim.

"You are a silent man for sure, you are. I 'm hoping it is not the curse upon you already."

"What curse?"

"Ah, *that* has brought the wind against the mist! I was thinking so!"

"What curse?"

"You are the man that was the Sin-Eater over there?"

"Ay."

"The man Macallum?"

"Ay."

"Strange it is, but three days ago I saw you in Tobermory, and heard you give your name as Neil Ross, to an Iona man that was there."

"Well?"

"Oh, sure, it is nothing to me. But they say the Sin-Eater should not be a man with a hidden lump in his pack."[1]

"Why?"

"For the dead know, and are content. There is no shaking off any sins, then: for that man."

"It is a lie."

"Maybe ay, and maybe no."

"Well, have you more to be saying to me? I am obliged to you for your company, but it is not needing it I am, though no offence."

"Och, man, there 's no offence between you and me. Sure, there 's Iona in me, too, for the father of my father married a woman that was

[1] *i. e.* With a criminal secret, or an undiscovered crime.

the granddaughter of Tomais Macdonald, who was a fisherman there. No, no, it is rather warning you I would be."

"And for what?"

"Well, well, just because of that laugh I heard about."

"What laugh?"

"The laugh of Adam Blair that is dead."

Neil Ross stared, his eyes large and wild. He leaned a little forward. No word came from him. The look that was on his face was the question.

"Yes: it was this way. Sure, the telling of it is just as I heard it. After you ate the sins of Adam Blair, the people there brought out the coffin. When they were putting him into it, he was as stiff as a sheep dead in the snow,—and just like that, too, with his eyes wide open. Well, some one saw you trampling the heather down the slope that is in front of the house, and said, 'It is the Sin-Eater!' With that, Andrew Blair sneered, and said, 'Ay, 'tis the scapegoat he is!' Then, after a while, he went on: 'The Sin-Eater they call him; ay, just so; and a bitter good bargain it is, too, if all 's true that 's thought true!'—and with that he laughed, and then

his wife that was behind him laughed, and then — "

"Well, what then?"

"Well, 'tis Himself that hears and knows if it is true! But this is the thing I was told: After that laughing there was a stillness, and a dread. For all there saw that the corpse had turned its head and was looking after you as you went down the heather. Then, Neil Ross, if that be your true name, Adam Blair that was dead put up his white face against the sky, and laughed."

At this, Ross sprang to his feet with a gasping sob.

"It is a lie, that thing," he cried, shaking his fist at the shepherd, "it is a lie."

"It is no lie. And by the same token, Andrew Blair shrank back white and shaking, and his woman had the swoon upon her, and who knows but the corpse might have come to life again had it not been for Maisie Macdonald, the deid-watcher, who clapped a handful of salt on his eyes, and tilted the coffin so that the bottom of it slid forward and so let the whole fall flat on the ground, with Adam Blair in it sideways, and as likely as not cursing and groaning as his wont

was, for the hurt both to his old bones and his old ancient dignity."

Ross glared at the man as though the madness was upon him. Fear, and horror, and fierce rage, swung him now this way and now that.

"What will the name of you be, shepherd?" he stuttered huskily.

"It is Eachainn Gilleasbuig I am to ourselves, and the English of that for those who have no Gaelic is Hector Gillespie; and I am Eachainn mac Ian mac Alasdair, of Srathsheean, that is where Sutherland lies against Ross."

"Then take this thing, and that is, the curse of the Sin-Eater! And a bitter bad thing may it be upon you and yours!"

And with that Neil the Sin-Eater flung his hand up into the air, and then leaped past the shepherd, and a minute later was running through the frightened sheep, with his head low, and a white foam on his lips, and his eyes red with blood as a seal's that has the death-wound on it.

On the third day of the seventh month from that day, Aulay Macneill, coming into Ballie-

more of Iona from the west side of the island, said to old Ronald MacCormick, that was the father of his wife, that he had seen Neil Ross again, and that he was "absent" — for though he had spoken to him, Neil would not answer, but only gloomed at him from the wet weedy rock where he sat.

The going back of the man had loosed every tongue that was in Iona. When, too, it was known that he was wrought in some terrible way, if not actually mad, the islanders whispered that it was because of the sins of Adam Blair. Seldom or never now did they speak of him by his name, but, simply, "The Sin-Eater." The thing was not so rare as to cause this strangeness, nor did many (and perhaps none did) think that the sins of the dead ever might or could abide with the living who had merely done a good Christian, charitable thing. But there was a reason.

Not long after Neil Ross had come again to Iona, and had settled down in the ruined roofless house on the croft of Ballyrona, just like a fox or a wild-cat, as the saying was, he was given fishing-work to do by Aulay Macneill, who lived at Ard-an-teine, at the rocky north end of the

Màchar or plain that is on the west Atlantic coast of the island.

One moonlit night, either the seventh or the ninth after the earthing of Adam Blair at his own place in the Ross, Aulay Macneill saw Neil Ross steal out of the shadow of Ballyrona and make for the sea. Macneill was there, by the rocks, mending a lobster-creel. He had gone there because of the sadness. Well, when he saw the Sin-Eater he watched.

Neil crept from rock to rock till he reached the last fang that churns the sea into yeast when the tide sucks the land, just opposite.

Then he called out something that Aulay Macneill could not catch. With that he springs up, and throws his arms above him.

"Then," says Aulay, when he tells the tale, "it was like a ghost he was. The moonshine was on his face like the curl o' a wave. White! there is no whiteness like that of the human face. It was whiter than the foam about the skerry it was, whiter than the moonshining, whiter than — well, as white as the painted letters on the black boards of the fishing-cobles. There he stood, for all that the sea was about him, the slip-slop waves leapin' wild, and the tide making too at

that. He was shaking like a sail two points off the wind. It was then that all of a sudden he called in a womany screamin' voice: —

"'I am throwing the sins of Adam Blair into the midst of ye, white dogs o' the sea! Drown them, tear them, drag them away out into the black deeps! Ay, ay, ay, ye dancin' wild waves, this is the third time I am doing it; and now there is none left, no, not a sin, not a sin.

'O-hi, O-ri, dark tide o' the sea,
I am giving the sins of a dead man to thee!
By the Stones, by the Wind, by the Fire, by the Tree,
From the dead man's sins set me free, set me free!
Adam mhic Anndra mhic Adam and me,
Set us free! Set us free!'

"'Ay, sure, the Sin-Eater sang that over and over. And after the third singing he swung his arms and screamed, —

'And listen to me, black waters an' running tide,
That rune is the good rune told me by Maisie the wise,
And I am Neil, the son of Silis Macallum,
By the black-hearted evil man Murtagh Ross,
That was the friend of Adam Mac Anndra, God against him!'

"And with that he scrambled and fell into the sea. But, as I am Aulay Mac Luais and no

other, he was up in a moment, an' swimmin' like a seal, and then over the rocks again, an' away back to that lonely roofless place once more, laughing wild at times, an' muttering an' whispering."

It was this tale of Aulay Macneill's that stood between Neil Ross and the islefolk. There was something behind all that, they whispered one to another.

So it was always the Sin-Eater he was called at last. None sought him. The few children who came upon him, now and again, fled at his approach, or at the very sight of him. Only Aulay Macneill saw him at times, and had word of him.

After a month had gone by, all knew that the Sin-Eater was wrought to madness, because of this awful thing; the burden of Adam Blair's sins would not go from him! Night and day he could hear them laughing low, it was said.

But it was the quiet madness. He went to and fro like a shadow in the grass, and almost as soundless as that, and as voiceless. More and more the name of him grew as a terror. There were few folk on that wild west coast of

Iona, and these few avoided him when the word ran that he had knowledge of strange things, and converse, too, with the secrets of the sea.

One day Aulay Macneill, in his boat, but dumb with amaze and terror for him, saw him at high-tide swimming on a long rolling wave right into the hollow of the Spouting Cave. In the memory of man, no one had done this and escaped one of three things: a snatching away into oblivion, a strangled death, or madness. The islanders know that there swims into the cave at full tide a Mar-Tarbh, a dreadful creature of the sea that some call a kelpie; only it is not a kelpie, which is like a woman, but rather is a sea-bull, offspring of the cattle that are never seen. Ill indeed for any sheep or goat, ay or even dog or child, if any happens to be leaning over the edge of the Spouting Cave when the Mar-Tarbh roars; for, of a surety, it will fall in and straightway be devoured.

With awe and trembling Aulay listened for the screaming of the doomed man. It was full tide, and the sea-beast would be there.

The minutes passed, and no sign. Only the hollow booming of the sea, as it moved like a

baffled blind giant round the cavern-bases; only the rush and spray of the water flung up the narrow shaft high into the windy air above the cliff it penetrates.

At last he saw what looked like a mass of sea-weed swirled out on the surge. It was the Sin-Eater. With a leap, Aulay was at his oars. The boat swung through the sea. Just before Neil Ross was about to sink for the second time, he caught him, and dragged him into the boat.

But then, as ever after, nothing was to be got out of the Sin-Eater save a single saying: "*Tha e lamhan fuar! Tha e lamhan fuar!*" "It has a cold, cold hand!"

The telling of this and other tales left none free upon the island to look upon the "scape-goat" save as one accursed.

It was in the third month that a new phase of his madness came upon Neil Ross.

The horror of the sea and the passion for the sea came over him at the same happening. Oftentimes he would race along the shore, screaming wild names to it, now hot with hate and loathing, now as the pleading of a man with the woman of his love. And strange

chants to it, too, were upon his lips. Old, old lines of forgotten runes were overheard by Aulay Macneill, and not Aulay only, — lines wherein the ancient sea-name of the island, *Ioua*, that was given to it long before it was called Iona, or any other of the nine names that are said to belong to it, occurred again and again.

The flowing tide it was that wrought him thus. At the ebb he would wander across the weedy slabs or among the rocks, silent, and more like a lost *duinshee* than a man.

Then again after three months a change in his madness came. None knew what it was, though Aulay said that the man moaned and moaned because of the awful burden he bore. No drowning seas for the sins that could not be washed away, no grave for the live sins that would be quick till the Day of the Judgment!

For weeks thereafter he disappeared. As to where he was, it is not for the knowing.

Then at last came that third day of the seventh month when, as I have said, Aulay Macneill told old Ronald MacCormick that he had seen the Sin-Eater again.

It was only a half-truth that he told, though.

For after he had seen Neil Ross upon the rock, he had followed him when he rose and wandered back to the roofless place which he haunted now as of yore. Less wretched a shelter now it was, because of the summer that was come, though a cold wet summer at that.

"Is that you, Neil Ross?" he had asked, as he peered into the shadows among the ruins of the house.

"That's not my name," said the Sin-Eater; and he seemed as strange then and there, as though he were a castaway from a foreign ship.

"And what will it be then, you that are my friend, and sure knowing me as Aulay Mac Luais, — Aulay Macneill that never grudges you bit or sup?"

"*I am Judas.*"

"And at that word," says Aulay Macneill, when he tells the tale, "at that word the pulse in my heart was like a bat in a shut room. But after a bit I took up the talk.

"'Indeed,' I said, 'and I was not for knowing that. May I be so bold as to ask whose son, and of what place?'

"But all he said to me was, '*I am Judas.*'

"Well, I said, to comfort him, 'Sure, it's not such a bad name in itself, though I am knowing some which have a more homelike sound.' But no, it was no good.

"'I am Judas. And because I sold the Son of God for five pieces of silver—'But here I interrupted him and said, 'Sure now, Neil,—I mean, Judas,—it was eight times five.' Yet the simpleness of his sorrow prevailed, and I listened with the wet in my eyes.

"'I am Judas. And because I sold the Son of God for five silver shillings, He laid upon me all the nameless black sins of the world. And that is why I am bearing them till the Day of Days.'"

And this was the end of the Sin-Eater,—for I will not tell the long story of Aulay Macneill, that gets longer and longer every winter, but only the unchanging close of it.

I will tell it in the words of Aulay.

"A bitter wild day it was, that day I saw him to see him no more. It was late. The sea was red with the flamin' light that burned up the air betwixt Iona and all that is west of West. I was

on the shore, looking at the sea. The big green waves came in like the chariots in the Holy Book. Well, it was on the black shoulder of one of them, just short of the ton o' foam that swept above it, that I saw a spar surgin' by.

"'What is that?' I said to myself. And the reason of my wondering was this. I saw that a smaller spar was swung across it. And while I was watching that thing another great billow came in with a roar, and hurled the double-spar back, and not so far from me but I might have gripped it. But who would have gripped that thing if he were for seeing what I saw?

"It is Himself knows that what I say is a true thing.

"On that spar was Neil Ross, the Sin-Eater. Naked he was as the day he was born. And he was lashed, too, ay, sure he was lashed to it by ropes round and round his legs and his waist and his left arm. It was the Cross he was on. I saw that thing with the fear upon me. Ah, poor drifting wreck that he was! *Judas on the Cross!* It was his *eric!*

"But even as I watched, shaking in my limbs, I saw that there was life in him still. The lips were moving, and his right arm was ever for

swinging this way and that. 'Twas like an oar working him off a lee shore; ay, that was what I thought.

"Then all at once he caught sight of me. Well, he knew me, poor man, that has his share of heaven now, I am thinking!

"He waved, and called, but the hearing could not be, because of a big surge o' water that came tumbling down upon him. In the stroke of an oar he was swept close by the rocks where I was standing. In that flounderin', seethin' whirlpool I saw the white face of him for a moment, an', as he went out on the resurge like a hauled net, I heard these words fallin' against my ears: —

"'*An eirig m' anama!* — In ransom for my soul!'

"And with that I saw the double-spar turn over and slide down the back-sweep of a drowning big wave. Ay, sure, it went out to the deep sea swift enough then. It was in the big eddy that rushes between Skerry-Mòr and Skerry-Beag. I did not see it again, no, not for the quarter of an hour, I am thinking. Then I saw just the whirling top of it rising out of the flying yeast of a great black, blustering wave that was rush-

ing northward before the current that is called the Black-Eddy.

"With that you have the end of Neil Ross: ay, sure, him that was called the Sin-Eater. And that is a true thing, and may God save us the sorrow of sorrows!

"And that is all."

The Ninth Wave.

THE wind fell as we crossed the Sound. There was only one oar in the boat, and we lay idly adrift. The tide was still on the ebb, and so we made way for Soa, though well before the island could be reached the tide would turn, and the sea-wind would stir, and we be up the Sound, and at Balliemore again almost as quick as the laying of a net.

As we — and by "us" I am meaning Phadric Macrae and Ivor McLean, fishermen of Iona, and myself beside Ivor at the helm — as we slid slowly past the ragged islet known as Eilean-na-h' Aon-Chaorach, torn and rent by the tides and surges of a thousand years, I saw a school of seals basking in the sun. One by one slithered into the water, and I could note the dark forms, like moving patches of sea-weed, drifting in the green underglooms.

Then after a time we bore down upon Sgeir-na-Oir, a barren rock. Three great cormorants stood watching us. Their necks shone in the sunlight like snakes mailed in blue and green. On the upper ledges were eight or ten northern divers. They did not seem to see us, though I knew that their fierce light-blue eyes noted every motion we made. The small sea-ducks bobbed up and down, first one flirt of a little black-feathered rump, then another, then a third, till a score or so were under water, and half a hundred more were ready at a moment's notice to follow suit. A skua hopped among the sputtering weed, and screamed disconsolately at intervals. Among the myriad colonies of close-set mussels, which gave a blue bloom, like that of the sloe, to the weed-covered boulders, a few kittiwakes and dotterels flitted to and fro. High over head, white against the blue as a cloudlet, a gannet hung motionless, seemingly frozen to the sky.

Below the lapse of the boat the water was pale green. I could see the liath and saith fanning their fins in slow flight, and sometimes a little scurrying cloud of tiny fluckies and inch-long codling. For two or three fathoms beyond the boat the waters were blue. If blueness can be

alive, and have its own life and movement, it must be happy on these western seas, where it dreams into shadowy Lethes of amethyst and deep, dark oblivions of violet.

Suddenly a streak of silver ran for a moment along the sea to starboard. It was like an arrow of moonlight shot along the surface of the blue and gold. Almost immediately afterward, a stertorous sigh was audible. A black knife cut the flow of the water: the shoulder of a pollack.

"The mackerel are coming in from the sea," said Macrae. He leaned forward, wet the palm of his hand, and held it seaward. "Ay, the tide has turned —

Ohrone — achree — an — Srùth-màra!
Ohrone — achree — an — Lionadh!"

he droned monotonously, over and over with few variations.

"An' it 's Oh an' Oh for the tides o' the sea,
An' it 's Oh for the flowing tide,"

I sang at last in mockery.

"Come, Phadric," I cried, "you are as bad as Peter McAlpin's lassie, Fiona, with the pipes!"

Both men laughed lightly. On the last Sabbath, old McAlpin had held a prayer-meeting

in his little house in the "street," in Balliemore of Iona. At the end of his discourse he told his hearers that the voice of God was terrible only to the evil-doer but beautiful to the righteous man, and that this voice was even now among them, speaking in a thousand ways and yet in one way. And at this moment, that elfin granddaughter of his, who was in the byre close by, let go upon the pipes with so long and weary a whine that the collies by the fire whimpered, and would have howled outright but for the Word of God that still lay open on the big stool in front of old Peter. For it was in this way that the dogs knew when the Sabbath readings were over; and there was not one that would dare to bark or howl, much less rise and go out, till the Book was closed with a loud, solemn bang. Well, again and again that weary quavering moan went up and down the room, till even old McAlpin smiled, though he was fair angry with Fiona. But he made the sign of silence, and began: "My brethren, even in this trial it may be the Almighty has a message for us"—when at that moment Fiona was kicked by a cow, and fell against the board with the pipes, and squeezed out so wild a wail that McAlpin started

up and cried, in the Lowland way that he had won out of his wife, "*Hoots, havers, an' a'! come oot o' that, ye Deil's spunkie'!*"

So it was this memory that made Phadric and Ivor smile. Suddenly Ivor began with a long rising and falling cadence, an old Gaelic rune of the Faring of the Tide.

Athair, A mhic, A Spioraid Naoimh,
Biodh an Tri-aon leinn, a la's a dh' oidhche;
S' air chul nan tonn, no air thaobh nam beann!

O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Be the Three-in-One with us day and night,
On the crested wave, when waves run high!

And out of the place in the West
Where Tir-nan-Òg, the Land of Youth
Is, the Land of Youth everlasting,
Send the great Tide that carries the sea-weed
And brings the birds, out of the North:
And bid it wind as a snake through the bracken,
As a great snake through the heather of the sea,
The fair blooming heather of the sunlit sea.

And may it bring the fish to our nets,
And the great fish to our lines:
And may it sweep away the sea-hounds
That devour the herring:

And may it drown the heavy pollack
That respect not our nets
But fall into and tear them and ruin them wholly.

And may I, or any that is of my blood,
Behold not the Wave-Haunter who comes in with the Tide,
Or the Maighdeann-màra who broods in the shallows,
Where the sea-caves are, in the ebb:
And fair may my fishing be, and the fishing of those near to me,
And good may this Tide be, and good may it bring:
And may there be no calling in the Flow, this Srùth-màra,
And may there be no burden in the Ebb! *Ochone!*

An ainm an Athar, s' an Mhic, s' an Spioraid Naoimh,
Biodh an Tri-aon leinn, a la's a dh' oidhche,
S' air chul nan tonn, no air thaobh nam beann!
Ochone! arone!

Both men sang the closing lines with loudly swelling voices and with a wailing fervour which no words of mine could convey.

Runes of this kind prevail all over the isles, from the Butt of Lewis to the Rhinns of Islay: identical in spirit, though varying in lines and phrases, according to the mood and temperament of the *rannaiche* or singer, the local or peculiar physiognomy of nature, the instinctive yielding to hereditary wonder-words, and other

compelling circumstances of the outer and inner life. Almost needless to say, the sea-maid or sea-witch and the Wave-Haunter occur in many of those wild runes, particularly in those that are impromptu. In the Outer Hebrides, the runes are wild natural hymns rather than Pagan chants; though marked distinctions prevail there also, — for in Harris and the Lews the folk are Protestant almost to a man, while in Benbecula and the Southern Hebrides the Catholics are in a like ascendancy. But all are at one in the common Brotherhood of Sorrow.

The only lines in Ivor McLean's wailing song which puzzled me were the two last which came before "the good words," "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit," etc.

"Tell me, in English, Ivor," I said, after a silence, wherein I pondered the Gaelic words, "what is the meaning of —

'And may there be no calling in the Flow, this Srùth-màra,
And may there be no burden in the Ebb?'"

"Yes, I will be telling you what is the meaning of that. When the great tide that wells out of the hollow of the sea, and sweeps towards all the coasts of the world, first stirs, when she will be

knowing that the Ebb is not any more moving at all, she sends out nine long waves. And I will be forgetting what these waves are: but one will be to shepherd the sea-weed that is for the blessing of man, and another is for to wake the fish that sleep in the deeps, and another is for this, and another will be for that, and the seventh is to rouse the Wave-Haunter and all the creatures of the water that fear and hate man, and the eighth no man knows, though the priests say it is to carry the Whisper of Mary, and the ninth —"

"And the ninth, Ivor?"

"May it be far from us, from you and from me and from those of us! An' I will be sayin' nothing against it, not I; nor against anything that is in the sea! An' you will be noting that!

"Well, this ninth wave goes through the water on the forehead of the tide. An' wherever it will be going it *calls*. An' the call of it is, '*Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow! . . . Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow!*'[1] An' whoever hears that must arise and go, whether he be fish or pollack, or seal or otter,

[1] Ivor of course gave these words in the Gaelic.

or great skua or small tern, or bird or beast of the shore, or bird or beast of the sea, or whether it be man or woman or child, or any of the others."

"*Any of the others*, Ivor?"

"I will not be saying anything about that," replied McLean, gravely; "you will be knowing well what I mean, and if you do not it is not for me to talk of that which is not to be talked about.

"Well, as I was for saying: that calling of the ninth wave of the Tide is what Ian-Mòr of the hills speaks of as 'the whisper of the snow that falls on the hair, the whisper of the frost that lies on the cold face of him that will never be waking again.'"

"*Death?*"

"It is *you* that will be saying it.

"Well," he resumed after a moment's hush, "a man may live by the sea for five score years and never hear that ninth wave call in any *Srùth-màra*, but soon or late he will hear it. An' many is the Flood that will be silent for all of us: but there will be one Flood for each of us that will be a dreadful Voice, a voice of terror and of dreadfulness. And whoever hears that

Voice, he for sure will be the burden in the Ebb."

"Has any heard that Voice, and lived?"

McLean looked at me, but said nothing. Phadric Macrae rose, tautened a rope, and made a sign to me to put the helm alee. Then, looking into the green water slipping by,—for the tide was feeling our keel, and a stronger breath from the sea lay against the hollow that was growing in the sail,—he said to Ivor:—

"You should be telling her of Ivor MacIvor Mhic Niall."

"Who was Ivor MacNeil?" I said.

"He was the father of my mother," answered McLean, "and was known throughout the north isles as Ivor Carminish, for he had a farm on the eastern lands of Carminish which lie between the hills called Strondeval and Rondeval, that are in the far south of the northern Hebrides, and near what will be known to you as the Obb of Harris.

"And I will now be telling you about him in the Gaelic, for it is more easy to me, and more pleasant for us all.

"When Ivor MacEachainn Carminish, that was Ivor's father, died, he left the farm to his

elder son and to his second son, Sheumais. By this time, Ivor was married, and had the daughter who is my mother. But he was a lonely man, and an islesman to the heart's core. So . . . but you will be knowing the isles that lie off the Obb of Harris,—the Saghay, and Ensay, and Killegray, and farther west, Berneray and, north-west, Pabaidh, and beyond that again, Shillaidh?"

For the moment I was confused, for these names are so common: and I was thinking of the big isle of Berneray that lies in huge Loch Roag that has swallowed so great a mouthful of Western Lewis, to the seaward of which also are the two Pabbays, Pabaidh Mòr and Pabaidh Beag. But when McLean added, "and other isles of the Caolas Harrish" (the Sound of Harris), I remembered aright; and indeed I knew both, though the nor' isles better, for I had lived near Callernish on the inner waters of Roag.

"Well, Carminish had sheep-runs upon some of these. One summer the gloom came upon him, and he left Sheumais to take care of the farm and of Morag his wife, and of Sheen their daughter; and he went to live upon Pab-

bay, near the old castle that is by the Rua Dune on the south-east of the isle. There he stayed for three months. But on the last night of each month he heard the sea calling in his sleep; and what he heard was like '*Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow . . . Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow!*' And he knew the voice of the ninth wave; and that it would not be there in the darkness of sleep if it were not already moving towards him through the dark ways of *An Dàn* (Destiny). So, thinking to pass away from a place doomed for him, and that he might be safe elsewhere, he sailed north to a kinsman's croft on Aird-Vanish in the island of Taransay. But at the end of that month he heard in his sleep the noise of tidal waters, and at the gathering of the ebb he heard '*Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow!*' Then once more, when the November heat-spell had come, he sailed farther northward still. He stopped a while at Eilean Mhealastaidh, which is under the morning shadow of high Griomabhal on the mainland, and at other places, till he settled, in the third week, at his cousin Eachainn MacEachainn's bothy, near Callernish, where the Great Stones of old

stand by the sea, and hear nothing forever but the noise of the waves of the North Sea and the cry of the sea-wind.

"And when the last night of November had come and gone, and he had heard in his sleep no calling of the ninth wave of the Flowing Tide, he took heart of grace. All through that next day he went in peace. Eachainn wondered often with slant eyes when he saw the morose man smile, and heard his silence give way now and again to a short, mirthless laugh.

"The two were at the porridge, and Eachainn was muttering his *Buï'cheas dha'n Ti*, the Thanks to the Being, when Carminish suddenly leaped to his feet, and, with white face, stood shaking like a rope in the wind.

"'In the name of the Son, what is it, Ivor Mhic Ivor? What is it, Carminish?' cried Eachainn.

"But the stricken man could scarce speak. At last, with a long sigh, he turned and looked at his kinsman, and that look went down into the shivering heart like the polar wind into a crofter's hut.

"'*What will be that?*' said Carminish, in a hoarse whisper.

"Eachainn listened, but he could hear no wailing *beann-sith*, no unwonted sound.

"'Sure, I hear nothing but the wind moaning through the Great Stones, an' beyond them the noise of the Flowin' Tide.'

"'The Flowing Tide! The Flowing Tide!' cried Carminish, and no longer with the hush in the voice. 'An' what is it you hear in the Flowing Tide?'

"Eachainn looked in silence. What was the thing he could say? For now he knew.

"Ah, och, och, ochone, you may well sigh, Eachainn Mhic Eachainn! For the ninth wave o' the Flowing Tide is coming out o' the North Sea upon this shore, an' already I can hear it calling, '*Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow! . . . Come away, come away, the sea waits! Follow!*'

"And with that Carminish dashed out the light that was upon the table, and leaped upon Eachainn, and dinged him to the floor and would have killed him, but for the growing noise of the sea beyond the Stannin' Stones o' Callanish, and the woe-weary sough o' the wind, an' the calling, calling, '*Come, come away! Come, come away!*'

"And so he rose and staggered to the door, and flung himself out into the night, while Eachainn lay upon the floor and gasped for breath, and then crawled to his knees, an' took the Book from the shelf by his fern-straw mattress, an' put his cheek against it, an' moaned to God, an' cried like a child for the doom that was upon Ivor MacIvor Mhic Niall, who was of his own blood, and his own *dall* at that.

"And while he moaned, Carminish was stalking through the great, gaunt, looming Stones of the Druids, that were here before St Colum and his *Shona* came, and laughing wild. And all the time the tide was coming in, and the tide and the deep sea and the waves of the shore and the wind in the salt grass and the weary reeds and the black-pool gale made a noise of a dreadful hymn, that was the death-hymn, the going-rune, of Ivor the son of Ivor of the kindred of Niall.

"And it was there that they found his body in the grey dawn, wet and stiff with the salt ooze. For the soul that was in him had heard the call of the ninth wave that was for him. So, and may the Being keep back that hour for

us, there was a burden upon that Ebb on the morning of that day.

"Also, there is this thing for the hearing. In the dim dark before the curlew cried at dawn, Eachainn heard a voice about the house, a voice going like a thing blind and baffled,

'Cha till, cha till, cha till mi tuille!'"
(I return, I return, I return never more!)

The Judgment o' God.

THE wind that blows on the feet of the dead came calling loud across the Ross, as we put about the boat off the Rudhe Callachain. The ebb sucked at the keel, while, like a cork, we were swung lightly by the swell. For we were in the strait between Eilean Dubh and the Isle of the Swine; and that is where the current has a bad pull, the current that is made of the in-flow and the outflow. I have heard that a weary woman of the olden days broods down there in a cave, and that day and night she weaves a web of water, which a fierce spirit in the sea tears this way and that as soon as woven.

So we put about, and went before the east wind; and below the dip of the sail alee I watched Soa grow bigger and gaunter and blacker against the white wave. As we came

so near that it was as though the wash of the sea among the hollows bubbled in our ears, I saw a large bull-seal lying half-in, half-out of the water, and staring at us with an angry, fearless look. Phadric and Ivor caught sight of it almost at the same moment.

To my surprise Macrae suddenly rose and put a *rosad* upon it. I could hear the wind through his clothes as he stood by the mast.

The *rosad* or spell was, of course, in the Gaelic; but its meaning was something like this: —

Ho, ro, O Ron dubh, O Ron dubh!
An ainm an Athar, O Ron!
'S an mhic, O Ron!
'S an Spioraid Naoimh,
O Ron-à'-mhàra, O Ron dubh!

Ho, ro, O black Seal, O black Seal!
In the name of the Father,
And of the Son,
And of the Holy Ghost,
O Seal of the deep sea, O black Seal!

Hearken the thing that I say to thee,
I, Phadric MacAlastair MhicCrae,
Who dwell in a house on the Island
That you look on night and day from Soa!
For I put *rosad* upon thee,

And upon the woman-seal that won thee,
And the women-seal that are thine,
And the young that thou hast,
Ay, upon thee and all thy kin
I put *rosad*, O Ron dubh, O Ron-à-mhàra!

And may no harm come to me or mine,
Or to any fishing or snaring that is of me,
Or to any sailing by storm or dusk,
Or when the moonshine fills the blind eyes of the dead,
No harm to me or mine
From thee or thine!

With a slow, swinging motion of his head Phadric broke out again into the first words of the incantation, and now Ivor joined him; and with the call of the wind and the leaping and the splashing of the waves was blent the chant of the two fishermen: —

Ho, ro, O Ron dubh! O Ron dubh!
An ainm an Athar, 's an Mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh,
O Ron-à'-mhàra, O Ron dubh!

Then the men sat back, with that dazed look in the eyes I have so often seen in those of men or women of the Isles who are wrought. No word was spoken till we came almost straight upon Eilean-na-h' Aon-Chaorach. Then at the

rocks we tacked, and went splashing up the Sound, like a pollack on a Sabbath noon.[1]

"What was wrong with the old man of the sea?" I asked Macrae.

At first he would say nothing. He looked vaguely at a coiled rope; then, with hand-shaded gaze across to the red rocks at Fhionnaphort. I repeated my question. He took refuge in English.

"It wass ferry likely the *Clansman* would be pringing ta new minister-body. Did you pe knowing him, or his people, or where he came from?"

But I was not to be put off thus; and at last, while Ivor stared down the green shelving lawns of the sea below us, Phadric told me this thing. His reluctance was partly due to the shyness which with the Gael almost invariably follows strong emotion; and partly to that strange, obscure, secretive instinct which is also

[1] The Iona fishermen, and indeed the Gaelic and Scottish fishermen generally, believe that the pollack (porpoise) knows when it is the Sabbath; and on that day will come closer to the land, and be more wanton in its gambols on the sun-warmed surface of the sea, than on the days when the herring-boats are abroad.

so characteristically Celtic, and often prevents Gaels of far apart isles, or of different clans, from communicating to each other stories or legends of a peculiarly intimate kind.

"I will tell you what my father told me, and what, if you like, you may hear again from the sister of my father, who is the wife of Ian Finlay, who has the farm on the north side of Dûn I.

"You will have heard of old James Achanna of Eilanmore, off the Ord o' Sutherland? To be sure, for have you not stayed there? Well, I need not tell you how he came there out of the south; but it will be news to you to learn that my elder brother Murdoch was had by him as a shepherd, and to help on the farm. And the way of that thing was this. Murdoch had gone to the fishing north of Skye, with Angus and William Macdonald, and in the great gale that broke up their boat, among so many others, he found himself stranded on Eilanmore. Achanna told him that as he was ruined, and so far from home, he would give him employment, and though Murdoch had never thought to serve under a Galloway man, he agreed.

"For a year he worked on the upper farm, Ardoch-beag, as it was called. There the gloom

came upon him. Turn which way he would, the beauty that is in the day was no more. In vain, when he came out into the air in the morning, did he cry *Deasiul!* and keep by the sunway. At night he heard the sea calling in his sleep. So, when the lambing was over, he told Achanna that he must go, for he hungered for the sea. True, the wave ran all around Eilanmore, but the farm was between bare hills and among high moors, and the house was in a hollow place. But it was needful for him to go. Even then, though he did not know it, the madness of the sea was upon him.

"But the Galloway man did not wish to lose my brother, who was a quiet man, and worked for a small wage. Murdoch was a silent lad, but he had often the light in his eyes, and none knew of what he was thinking; maybe it was of a lass, or a friend, or of the ingle-neuk where his old mother sang o' nights, or of the sight and sound of Iona that was his own land; but I 'm considerin' it was the sea he was dreamin' of,— how the waves ran laughin' an' dancin' against the tide, like lambkins comin' to meet the shepherd, or how the big green billows went sweepin' white an' ghostly through the moonless nights.

"So the troth that was come to between them was this: that Murdoch should abide for a year longer, that is, till Lammastide; then that he should no longer live at Ardoch-beag, but instead should go and keep the sheep on Bac-Mòr."

"On Bac-Mòr, Phadric," I interrupted, "for sure, you do not mean *our* Bac-Mòr?"

"For sure I mean no other: Bac-Mòr, of the Treshnish Isles, that is eleven miles north of Iona and a long four north-west of Staffa; an' just Bac-Mòr an' no other."

"Murdoch would be near home, there."

"Ay, near, an' farther away; for 'tis to be farther off to be near that your heart loves but ye can't get.

"Well, Murdoch agreed to this, but he did not know there was no boat on the island. It was all very well in the summer. The herrin'-smacks lay off Bac-Mòr or Bac-Beag many a time; and he could see them mornin', noon, an' night; an' nigh every day he could watch the big steamer comin' southward down the Mornish and Treshnish coasts of Mull, and stand by for an hour off Staffa, or else come northward

out of the Sound of Iona round the Eilean Rabach; and once or twice a week he saw the *Clansman* coming or going from Bunessan in the Ross to Scarnish in the Isle of Tiree. Maybe, too, now and again a foreign sloop or a coasting schooner would sail by; and twice, at least, a yacht lay off the wild shore, and put a boat in at the landing-place, and let some laughing folk loose upon that quiet place. The first time, it was a steam-yacht, owned by a rich foreigner, either an Englishman or an American, I misremember now: an' he spoke to Murdoch as though he were a savage, and he and his gay folk laughed when my brother spoke in the only English he had (an' sober good English it was), an' then he shoves some money into his hand, as though both were evil-doers and were ashamed to be seen doing what they did.

"'An' what is this for?' said my brother.

"'O it 's for yourself, my man, to drink our health with,' answered the English lord, or whatever he was, rudely.

"Then Murdoch looked at him and his quietly; an' he said, 'God has your health an' my health in the hollow of His hand. But I wish you well. Only I am not being your man any more than I

am for calling *you my* man; an' I will ask you to take back this money to drink with; nor have I any need for money, but only for that which is free to all, — but that only God can give.' And with that the foreign people went away, and laughed less. But when the second yacht came, though it was a yawl and owned by a Glasgow man who had folk in the west, Murdoch would not come down to the shore, but lay under the shadow of a rock amid his sheep, and kept his eyes upon the sun that was moving west out of the south.

"Well, all through the fine months Murdoch stayed on Bac-Mòr, and thereafter through the early winter. The last time I saw him was at the New Year. On Hogmanay night my father was drinking hard, and nothing would serve him but he must borrow Alec Macarthur's boat, and that he and our mother and myself,and Ian Finlay and his wife, my sister, should go out before the quiet south-wind that was blowing, and see Murdoch where he lay sleeping or sat dreaming in his lonely bothy. And truth, we went. It was a white sailing, that I remember. The moonshinings ran in and out of the wavelets like herrings through salmon nets. The fire-flauchts,

too, went speeding about. I was but a laddie then, an' I noted it all; an' the sheet-lightning that played behind the cloudy lift in the nor'-west.

"But when we got to Bac-Mòr there was no sign of Murdoch at the bothy; no, not though we called high and low. Then my father and Ian Finlay went to look, and we stayed by the peats. When they came back, an hour later, I saw that my father was no more in drink. He had the same look in his eyes as Ronald McLean had that day last winter when they told him his bit girlie had been caught by the small-pox in Glasgow.

"I could not hear, or I could not make out what was said; but I know that we all got into the boat again, all except my father. And he stayed. And next day, Ian Finlay and Alec Macarthur went out to Bac-Mòr and brought him back.

"And from him and from Ian I knew all there was to be known. It was a hard New Year for all, and since that day till a night of which I will tell you, my father brooded and drank, drank and brooded, and my mother wept through the winter gloamings and spent the night starin' into the peats wi' her knittin' lyin' on her lap.

"For when they had gone to seek Murdoch that Hogmanay night, they came upon him away from his sheep. But this was what they saw. There was a black rock that stood out in the moonshine, with the water all about it. And on this rock Murdoch lay naked, and laughing wild. An' every now and then he would lean forward, and stretch his arms out, an' call to his dearie. An' at last, just as the watchers, shiverin' wi' fear an' awe, were going to close in upon him, they saw a — a — thing — come out o' the water. It was long an' dark, an' Ian said its eyes were like clots o' blood; but as to that no man can say yea or nay, for Ian himself admits it was a seal.

"An' this thing is true, *an ainm an Athar!* they saw the dark beast o' the sea creep on to the rock beside Murdoch, an' lie down beside him, and let him clasp an' kiss it. An' then he stood up, and laughed till the skin crept on those who heard, and cried out on his dearie and on a' the dumb things o' the sea, an' the Wave-Haunter an' the grey shadow; an' he raised his hands, an' cursed the world o' men, and cried out to God, '*Turn your face to your own airidh, O God, an' may rain an' storm an' snow be between us!*'

"An' wi' that Deirg, his collie, could bide no more, but loupit across the water, and was on the rock beside him, wi' his fell bristling like a hedge-rat. For both the naked man an' the wet gleamin' beast, a great she-seal out o' the north, turned upon Deirg, an' he fought for his life. But what could the puir thing do? The seal buried her fangs in his shoulder, at last, an' pinned him to the ground. Then Murdoch stooped, an' dragged her off, an' bent down an' tore at the throat o' Deirg wi' his own teeth. Ay, God's truth it is! An' when the collie was stark, he took him up by the hind legs an' the tail, an' swung him round an' round his head, an' whirled him into the sea, where he fell black in a white splatch o' the moon.

"An' wi' that, Murdoch slipped, and reeled backward into the sea, his hands gripping at the whirling stars. An' the thing beside him louped after him, an' my father an' Ian heard a cry an' a cryin' that made their hearts sob. But when they got down to the rock they saw nothing, except the floating body o' Deirg.

"Sure it was a weary night for the old man, there on Bac-Mòr by himself, with that awful thing that had happened. He stayed there to

see and hear what might be seen and heard. But nothing he heard, nothing saw. It was afterwards that he heard how Donncha Mac-Donald was on Bac-Mòr three days before this, and how Murdoch had told him he was in love wi' a *maighdeannmhara*, a sea-maid.

"But this thing has to be known. It was a month later, on the night o' the full moon, that Ian Finlay and Ian Macarthur and Sheumais Macallum were upset in the calm water inside the Sound, just off Port-na-Frang, and were nigh drowned, but that they called upon God and the Son, and so escaped and heard no more the laughter of Murdoch from the sea.

"And at midnight my father heard the voice of his eldest son at the door; but he would not let him in; and in the morning he found his boat broken and shred in splinters, and his one net all torn. An' that day was the Sabbath; so being a holy day he took the Scripture with him, an' he and Neil Morrison the minister, having had the Bread an' Wine, went along the Sound in a boat, following a shadow in the water, till they came to Soa. An' there Neil Morrison read the Word o' God to the seals that lay baskin' in the sun; and one, a female, snarled and

showed her fangs; and another, a black one, lifted its head, and made a noise that was not like the barking of any seal, but was as the laughter of Murdoch when he swung the dead body of Deirg.

"And that is all that is to be said. And silence is best now between you and any other. And no man knows the judgments o' God.

"And that is all."

II

THE HARPING OF CRAVETHEEN.

THE

Harping of Cravetheen.

WHEN Cormac, that was known throughout all Northern Eiré as Cormac Conlingas, Cormac the son of Concobar the son of Nessa, was one of the ten hostages to Conairy Mòr for the lealty of the Ultonians, he was loved by men and women because of his strength, his valor, and his beauty.

He was taller than the tallest of his nine comrades by an inch, and broader by two inches than the broadest; though that fellowship of nine was of the tallest and broadest men among the Ultonians, who were the greatest warriors that green Banba, as Eiré or Erin was called by the bards who loved her, has ever seen.

The *shenachies* sang of him as a proud champion, with eyes full of light and fire, his countenance broad above and narrow below,

ruddy-faced, with hair as of the gold of the September moon.

The commonalty spoke of his mighty spear-thrust, of his deft sword-swing, the terror of his wrath, of the fury of his battle-lust, of his laughter and light joy, and the singing that was on his lips when his sword had the silence upon it. No man dared touch "Blue-Green," as Cormac Conlingas called it, — the "Whispering Sword," as it was named among his fellows. "Blue-Green," for in its sweep it gleamed blue-green as the leaping levin, whispered whenever it was athirst, and a red draught it was that would quench that thirst, and no other draught for the drinking; and it whispered when there was a ferment of the red blood among men who hated while they feared the Ultonians; and it whispered whenever a shadow dogged the shadow of Cormac, the son of Concobar the son of Nessa. Therefore it was that of all who desired his death, there was none that did not fear the doom-whisper of the sword that had been forged by Lên, the Smith, where he sits and works forever amid his mist of rainbows. Women spoke of his strength as though it were their proud beauty. He had the way of the sunlight with him, they

said. And of the sunfire, added one ever, below her breath; and that was Eilidh, the daughter of Conn Mac Art and of Dearduil, the daughter of Somhairle, the Prince of the Isles, — Eilidh, the daughter of Dearduil the daughter of Morna, the three queens of beauty in the three generations of the generations.

She was not of the Ultonians, this fair Eilidh; but of the people who were subject to Conairy Mòr. It was when the ten hostages abode with the Red Prince that she grew faint and wan with the love-sickness. Her mother, Dearduil, knew who the man was. She put a mirror of polished steel against the mouth of the girl while she slept, and then it was that she saw the flames of love burning a red heart on which was written in white fire, — "I am the heart of Cormac, the son of Concobar." The gladness was hers, as well as the fear. Sure, there was no greater hero than Cormac Conlingas; but then he was an Ultonian, and would soon be for going away; and ill-pleased would Conairy Mòr be that the beautiful Eilidh, who was his ward since the death of Conn, should be the wife of one of the men of Concobar Mac Nessa whom in his heart he hated.

There was a warrior there called Art Mac Art Mòr. Conairy Mòr loved him, and had promised him Eilidh. One day this man came to the overlord, and said this thing,—

"Is she, Eilidh, to be hearing the lowing of the kine that are upon my hills?"

"That is so, Art Mac Art."

"I have spoken to the girl. She is like the wind in the grass."

"It is the way of women. Quest, and trace, and you shall not find. But say 'Come,' and they will come; and say 'Do,' and they obey."

"I have put the word upon her, and she has laughed at me. I have said 'Come,' and she asked me if the running wave heard the voice of yesterday's wind. I have said 'Do,' and she called to me, 'Do the hills nod when the fox barks?'"

"What is the thing that is behind your lips, Art Mac Art Mòr?"

"This. That you send the man away that is the cause of the mischief that is upon Eilidh."

"Who is the man?"

"He is of the Hostages."

Conairy Mòr brooded awhile. Then he stroked his beard, brown-black as burn-water in shadow; and laughed.

"Why is there laughter upon you, my king?"

"Sure, I laugh to think of the blood of a white maid. They say it is of milk, but I am thinking it must be the milk of the hero-women of old that was red and warm as the stream the White Hound that courses through the night swims in. And that blood that is in Eilidh leads to the blood of heroes. She would have the weight of Cormac, the Yellow-haired, on her breast!"

"His blood or mine."

The king kept silence for a time. Then he smiled, and that boded ill. Then, after a while, he frowned, and that was not so ill.

"Not thine, Art."

"And if not mine, what of Cormac Mac Concobar?

"He shall go."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

And, sure, it was on the eve of that day that Dearduil went to warn Cormac Conlingas, and to beg him to leave the whiteness of the snow without a red stain.

But when she entered his sleeping-place Eilidh was there, upon the deer-skins.

Dearduil looked for long before she spoke.

"By what is in your eyes, Eilidh my daughter, this is not the first time you have come to Cormac Conlingas?"

The girl laughed low. The white arms of her moved through the gold of her hair like sickles among the corn. She looked at Cormac. The flame that was in her eyes was bright in his. The wife of Conn turned to him.

"No," he said gravely, "it is not the first time."

"Has the seed been sown, O husbandman?"

"The seed has been sown."

"It is death."

"The tide flows, the tide ebbs."

"Cormac, there will be two dead this night if Conairy Mòr hears this thing. And even now his word moves against you. Do you love Eilidh?"

Cormac smiled slightly, but made no answer.

"If you love her, you would not see her slain."

"There is no great evil in being slain, Dearduil-nic-Somhairle."

"She is a woman, and she has your child below her heart."

"That is a true thing."

"Will you save her?"

"If she will."

"Speak, Eilidh."

Then the terror that was in the girl's heart arose and moved about like a white bewildered bird in the dark. She knew that Dearduil had spoken out of her heart. She knew that Art Mac Art Mòr was in this evil. She knew that death was near for Cormac, and near for her. The limbs that had trembled with love, trembled now with the breath of the fear. Suddenly she drew a long sobbing sigh.

"Speak, Eilidh."

She turned her face to the wall.

"Speak, Eilidh."

"I will speak. Go, Cormac Conlingas."

The chief of the Ultonians started. This doom to life was worse to him than the death-doom. An angry flame burned in his eyes. His lip curled.

"May it not be a man-child you will have, Eilidh of the gold hair," he said scornfully, "for it would be an ill thing for a son of Cormac Mac Concobar to be a coward, as his mother was, and to fear death as she did, though never before her any of her race."

And with that he turned upon his heel, and went out.

Cormac Conlingas had not gone far when he met Art Mac Art Mòr, with the others.

"It is the king's word," said Art, simply.

"I am ready," answered Cormac. "Is it death?"

"Come; the king shall tell you."

But there was to be no blood that night. Only, on the morrow the hostages were nine. The tenth man rode slowly north eastward, against the graying of the dawn.

If, in the heart of Cormac Conlingas, there was sorrow and a bitter pain, because of Eilidh, whom he loved, and from whom he would fain have taken the harshness of his word, there was, in the heart of Eilidh, the sound as of trodden sods.

That day it was worse for her.

Conairy Mòr came to her himself. Art was at his right hand. The king asked her if she would give her troth to the son of Art-Mòr, and, that being given, if she would be his wife.

"That cannot be," she said. The fear that had been in the girl's heart was dead now. The

saying of Cormac had killed it. She knew that, like her ancestor, the mother of Somhairle, she could, if need be, have a log of burning wood against her breast and face the torture as though she were no more than holding a dead child there.

"And for why cannot it be?" asked Conairy Mòr.

"For it is not Art's child that I carry in my womb," answered Eilidh, simply.

The king gloomed. Art Mac Art put his right hand to the dagger at his silver-bossed leathern belt.

"Is it a wanton that you are?"

"No: by my mother's truth, and the mother of my mother. I love another man than Art Mac Art Mòr, and that man loves me, and I am his."

"Who is this man?"

"His name is in my heart only."

"I will ask you three things, Eilidh, daughter of Dearduil. Is the man one of your race? is he of noble blood? is he fit to wed the king's ward?"

"He is more fit to wed the king's ward than any man in Eiré. He is of noble blood,

and himself the son of a king. But he is an Ultonian."

"Thou hast said. It is Cormac Mac Concobar Mac Nessa."

"It is Cormac Conlingas."

With a loud laugh Art Mac Art strode forward. He raised his hand and flung it across the face of the girl.

"Art thou his tenth or his hundredth? Well, I would not have you now as a serving-wench."

Once more the king gloomed. It went ill with him, that sight of a man striking a woman, howsoever lightly.

"Art, I have slain a better man than you, for a thing less worthy than that. Take heed."

The man frowned, with the red light in his eyes.

"Will you do as you said, O king?"

"No, not now. Eilidh, that blow has saved you. I was going to let Art have his way of you, and then do with you what he willed, servitude or death. But now you are free of him. Only this thing I say; no Ultonian shall ever take you in his arms. You shall wed Cravetheen, the step-brother of Art."

"Cravetheen the Harper?"

"Even so."

"He is old, and is neither comely nor gracious."

"There is no age upon him that a maid need mock at; and he is gracious enough to those who do not cross him; and he has the mouth of honey, he has, and, if not as comely as Cormac Conlingas, is yet fair to see."

"But —"

"I have said."

And so it was. Cravetheen took Eilidh to wife. But he left the great Dûn of Conairy Mòr and went to live in his own dûn in the forest that clothed the frontiers of the land of the Ultonians.

He took his harp that night when for the first time she lay upon the deerskins in his dûn. and he played a wild air. Eilidh listened, The tears came into her eyes. Then deep shadows darkened them. Then she clenched her hands till the nails drew blood. At last she lay with her face to the wall, trembling.

For Cravetheen was a harper that had been taught by a Green Hunter on the slopes of

Sliav-Sheean. He could say that in music that other men could scarce say aright in words.

And when he had ended that night he went up to his wife.

"No, Eilidh, for all you are so white and soft, and for all the sweet ways of you, I shall not be laying my heart upon yours this night, nor for many nights. But a day shall come when I will be playing you a marriage song. But before that day I will play to you twice." "And beware the third playing" said his old mother, who sat before the smouldering logs, crooning and muttering.

As for the second playing; that was not till months later. It was at the set of the sun that had shone on the birthing of the child of Eilidh and Cormac Conlingas.

All through the soundless labour of the woman, for she had the pride of pride, Cravetheen the Harper played. What he played was that the child might be born dead. Eilidh knew this, and gave it the breath straight from her heart. "My pulse to you," she whispered between her low sobs. Then Cravetheen played that it might be born blind and deaf and dumb. But Eilidh knew this, and she whispered to the soul

that was behind her eyes, *Give it light;* and to the soul that was listening behind her ears, *Give it hearing:* and to the soul whose silence was beneath her silence, *Give it speech.*

And so the child was born; and it was a man-child, and fair to see.

When the swoon was upon Eilidh, Cravetheen ceased from his harping. He rose, and looked upon the woman. Then he lifted the child, and laid it on a doeskin in the sunlight, on a green place, that was the meeting-place of the moonshine dancers. Then he lifted his harp again, and again played.

At the first playing, the birds ceased from singing: there was silence amid the boughs. At the second, the leaves ceased from rustling: there was silence on the branches. At the third, the hare leapt no more, the fox blinked with sleep, the wolf lay down. At the fourth, and fifth, and sixth, the wind folded its wings like a great bird, the wood-breeze crept beneath the bracken and fell asleep, the earth sighed and was still. There was silence there,—for sure, silence everywhere, as of sleep.

At the seventh playing the quiet people came out upon the green place. They were small

and dainty, clad in green with small, white faces; just like lilies-of-the-valley they were.

They laughed low among themselves, and some clapped their hands. One climbed a thistle, and swung round and round till he fell on his back with a thud, like the fall of a dew-drop, and cried pitifully. There was no peace till a *duinshee* took him by a green leg and shoved him down a hole in the grass and stopped it with a dandelion.

Then one among them, with a scarlet robe and a green cap with a thread of thistledown waving from it like a plume, and with his wee, wee eyes aflame, stepped forward, and began to play on a little harp made of a bird-bone with three gossamer-films for strings. And the wild air that he played and the songs that he sang were those *fonnsheen* that few hear now, but that those who do hear know to be sweeter than the sorrow of joy.

Suddenly Cravetheen ceased playing, and then there was silence with the Green Harper also.

All of the hillside-folk stood still. When an eddy of air moved along the grass they wavered to and fro like reeds with the coolness at their feet.

Then the Green Harper threw aside his scarlet cloak and his green cap, and the hair of him was white and flowing as the *canna*. He broke the three threads of gossamer, and flung away the bird-bone harp. Then he drew a wee bit reed from his waist-band that was made of beaten gold, and put it to his lips, and began to play. And what he played was so passing sweet that Cravetheen went into a dream, and played the same wild air, and he not knowing it, nor any man.

It was with that that the soul of the child heard the elfin-music, and came out. Sure, it is a hard thing for the naked spirit to come away from its warm home of the flesh, with the blood coming and going forever like a mother's hand, warm and soft. But to the playing of Cravetheen and the Green Harper there was no denying. The soul came forth, and stood with great frightened eyes.

"*Shrink! Shrink! Shrink!*" cried all the quiet people, and, as they cried, the human spirit shrank so as to be at one with them.

Then, as it seemed, two shining white flowers —for they were bonnie, bonnie — stepped forward and took the human by the hand, and led

it away. And as they went, the others followed, all singing a glad song, that fell strange and faint upon the ear of Cravetheen. All passed into the hillside, save the Green Harper, who stopped awhile, playing and playing and playing, till Cravetheen dreamed he was Alldai, the God of Gods, and that the sun was his bride, and the moon his paramour, and the stars his children and the joys that were before him. Then he, too, passed.

With that, Cravetheen came out of his trance, and rubbed his eyes as a man startled from sleep.

He looked at the child. It would be a changeling now, he knew. But when he looked again he saw that it was dead.

So he called to Gealcas, that was his mother, and gave her the body.

"Take that to Eilidh," he said, "and tell her that this is the second playing; and that I will be playing once again, before it's breast to breast with us."

And these were the words that Gealcas said to Eilidh, who in her heart cursed Cravetheen, and mocked his cruel patience, and longed for Cormac of the Yellow Hair, and cared not

for all the harping that Cravetheen could do now.

It was in the Month of the White Flowers that Cormac Conlingas came again.

He was in the Southland when news reached him that his father, Concobar Mac Nessa, was dead. He knew that if he were not speedily in Ulster, the Ultonians might not grant him the Ard-Reeship. He, surely, and no other, should be Ard-Ree after Concobar; yet there was one other who might well become overlord of the Ultonians in his place, were he not swift with word and act.

So swift was he that he mounted and rode away from his fellows without taking with him the famous Spear of Pisarr, which was a terror in battle. This was that fiery, living spear, wrought by the son of Turenn, and won out of Eiré by the god Lu Lam-fáda. In battle it flew hither and thither, a live thing.

He rode from noon to within an hour of the setting of the sun. Then he saw a long, green hill rise like a pine-cone out of the wood, bossed with still-standing stones of an ancient ruined dûn. Against it a blue column of smoke trailed.

Cormac knew now where he was. Word had come to him recently from Eilidh herself.

He drew rein, and stared awhile. Then he smiled; then once more he gloomed, and his eyes were heavy with the shadow of that gloom.

It was then that he drew "Blue-Green" from its sheath, and listened. There was a faint murmur along the blade, as of gnats above a pool; but there was no whispering.

Once more he smiled.

"It will be for the happening," he murmured. Then, leaning back, he sang this Rune to Eilidh.

Oimé, Oimé, Woman of the white breasts, Eilidh;
Woman of the golden hair, and lips of the red, red rowan!
Oimé, O-rì, Oimé!

Where is the swan that is whiter, with breast more soft,
Or the wave on the sea that moves as thou movest Eilidh —
Oimé, a-rò; Oimé, a-rò!

It is the marrow in my bones that is aching, aching, Eilidh;
It is the blood in my body that is a bitter, wild tide Oimé!
O-rì, O-hìon, O-rì, aròne!

Is it the heart of thee calling that I am hearing, Eilidh,
Or the wind in the wood, or the beating of the sea, Eilidh,
Or the beating of the sea?

Shule, shule agràh, shule agràh, shule agràh, Shùle!
Heart of me, move to me! move to me! heart of me, Eilidh, Eilidh,
Move to me!

Ah, let the wild hawk take it, the name of me, Cormac Conlingas,
Take it and tear at thy heart with it, heart that of old was so hot with it,
Eilidh, Eilidh, o-rì, Eilidh, Eilidh!

And the last words of that song were so loud and clear — loud and clear as the voice of the war-horn — that Eilidh heard. The heart of her leapt, the breast of her heaved, the pulses danced in the surge of the blood. Once more it was with her as though she were with child by Cormac Conlingas. She bade the old mother of Cravetheen and all who abode in the dûn to remain within, and not one to put the gaze upon the *grîanan*, her own place there, or upon whom she should lead to it. Then she went forth to meet Cormac, glad to think of Cravetheen far thence on the hunting, and not to be back again till the third day.

It was a meeting of two waves, that. Each was lost in the other. Then, after long looking in the eyes, and with the words aswoon on the lips, they moved hand in hand towards the dûn.

And as they moved, the Whispering of the Sword made a sound like the going of wind through grass.

"What is that?" said Eilidh, her eyes large.

"It is the wind in the grass," Cormac answered.

And as they entered the dûn the Whispering of the Sword made a confused murmur as of the wind among swaying pines.

"What is that?" Eilidh asked, fear in her eyes.

"It is the wind in the forest," said Cormac.

But when, after he had eaten and drunken, they went up to the Grianan, and lay down upon the deer-skins, the Whispering of the Sword was so loud that it was as the surf of the sea in a wild wind.

"What is that?" cried Eilidh, with a sob in her throat.

"It is the wind on the sea," Cormac said, his voice hoarse and low.

"There is no sea within three days' march," whispered Eilidh, as she clasped her hands.

But Cormac said nothing. And, now, the Sword was silent also.

It was that night that Cravetheen returned. He was playing one of the *fonnsheen* he knew, as he came through the wood in the moonlight; for in the hunting of a stag he had made a great circle and was now near Dunchraig again, Dunchraig that was his dûn. But he had left his horse with his kindred in the valley, and had come afoot through the wood.

He stopped as he was nigh upon the rocks against which the dûn was built. He saw the blackness of the shadow of a living thing.

"Who is that?" he cried.

"It is I, Murtagh Làm-Rossa," — and with that a man out of the dûn came forward slowly and hesitatingly. He was a man who hated Eilidh, because she had put him to shame.

Cravetheen looked at him.

"I am waiting," he said.

Still the man hesitated.

"I am waiting, Murtagh Làm-Rossa."

"This is a bitter thing I have to say. I was on my way for the telling."

"It is of Eilidh that is my wife?"

"You have said it."

"Speak."

"She does not sleep alone in the Grianan, and there is no one of the dûn who is there with her."

"Who is there?"

"A man."

Cravetheen drew a long breath. His hand went to the dagger at his belt.

"What man?"

"Cormac mac Concobar, that is called Cormac Conlingas."

Again Cravetheen drew a deep breath, and the blood was on his lip.

"You are knowing this thing for sure?"

"I am knowing it."

"That is what no other man shall do," and with that Cravetheen flashed the dagger in the moonshine, and thrust it with a surging sound into the heart of Murtagh Làm-Rossa.

With a groan the man sank. His white hands wandered among the fibrous dust of the pine-needles. His face was as a livid wave with the foam of death on it.

Cravetheen looked at the froth on his lips; it was like that of the sped deer. He looked at

the bubbles about the hilt of the knife; they were as the yeast of cranberries.

"That is the sure way of silence," he said; and he moved on, and thought no more of the man.

When he came nigh the dûn he stood a long while in thought. He could not reach the Grianan, he knew. Swords and spears for Eilidh, before then, mayhap; and, if not, there was Cormac Conlingas, — and not Cormac only, but the Sword "Blue-Green," and the Spear "Pisarr."

But a thought drove into his mind as a wind into a corrie. He put back his sword, and took his harp again. "It is the third playing," he muttered with a grim smile. Then once more he stood on the green rath of the quiet people, and played the *fonnsheen* till they heard. And when the old elfin harper was come, Cravetheen played the Tune of the Asking.

"What will you be wanting, Cravetheena Mac Rory," asked the Green Harper.

"The Tune of the Trancing Sleep, green prince of the hill."

"Sure, you shall have it:" and with that the Green Harper gave the magic melody, so that not

a leaf stirred, not a bird moved, and even the dew ceased to fall.

Then Cravetheen took his harp and played.

The dogs in the dûn rose, but none howled. Then all lay down nosing their outstretched paws. Thrice the stallions in the rear of the dûn put back their ears, but no neighing was on their curled lips. The mares whimpered, and then stood with heads low, asleep. The armed men did not awake, but slumbered deep. The women dreamed into the darkness where no dream is. The old mother of Cravetheen stirred, crooned wearily, bowed her gray head and was in Tir-nan-og again, walking with Rory mac Rory that loved her, him that was slain with a spear and a sword long, long ago.

Only Eilidh and Cormac Conlingas were waking. Sweet was that wild harping against their ears.

"It will be the Green Harper himself,' whispered Cormac, drowsy with the sleep that was upon him.

"It will be the harping of Cravetheen I am thinking," said Eilidh, with a low sigh, yet as though that thing were nothing to her. But Cormac did not hear, for he was asleep.

"I see nine shadows leaping upon the wall," murmured Eilidh, while her heart beat and her limbs lay in chains.

"'. . . *Move to me, heart of me, Eilidh, Eilidh, Move to me,*'"

sang Cormac, in a slow, chanting whisper.

"I see nine hounds leaping into the dûn," Eilidh cried, though none heard.

Cormac smiled in his sleep.

"Ah, ah, I see nine red phantoms leaping into the room!" screamed Eilidh; but none heard.

Cormac smiled in his sleep.

And then it was that the nine red flames grew ninefold, and the whole dûn was wrapt in flame.

For this was the doing of Cravetheen the Harper. All there died in the flame. That was the end of Eilidh, that was so fair. She laughed the pain away, and died. And Cormac smiled, and as the flame leapt on his breast he muttered, "*Ah, hot heart of Eilidh! — heart to me — move to me!*" And he died.

There was no dûn, and there were no folk, and no stallions and mares, and no baying

hounds, when Cravetheen ceased from the playing, — but only ashes.

He looked at them till dawn. Then he rose, and he broke his harp. Northward he went, to tell the Ultonians that thing, and to die the death.

And this was the end of Cormac the Hero, Cormac the son of Concobar the son of Nessa, that was called Cormac Conlingas.

III

TRAGIC LANDSCAPES.

Tragic Landscapes.

I.

The Tempest.

The forest undulated across the land in vast black-green billows. Their sombre solitudes held no light. The sky was of a uniform grey, a dull metallic hue such as the sea takes when a rainy wind comes out of the east. There was not a break in the appalling monotony.

To the north rose a chain of mountains. Connecting one to another, were serrated scaurs, or cleft, tortured, and precipitous ridges. The wild-stag had his sanctuary here; here were reared the young of the osprey, the raven, the kestrel, and the corbie. On the extreme heights the eagles called from their eyries at sunrise; at

sundown they might be seen whirling like minute discs around the flaming peaks.

An absolute silence prevailed. At long intervals there was the restless mewing of a wind-eddy, baffled among the remote corries. Sometimes, far beneath and beyond, in the midmost depths of the forest, a sound, as of the flowing tide at an immeasurable distance, rose, sighed through the grey silences, and sank into their drowning depths.

At noon, a slight stir was visible here and there. Two crows drifted inky-black against the slate-grey firmament. A kestrel, hovering over a rocky wilderness, screamed, and with a sudden slant cut the heavy air, skimmed the ground, breasted the extreme summits of the pines, and sailed slowly westward, silent, apparently motionless, till absorbed into the gloom. A slight mist rose from a stagnant place. On a black moorland tract, miles away from where the forest began, two small, gaunt creatures, human males, stooped continually, tearing at the peaty soil.

By the fourth hour from noon, there was nothing audible; not a thing visible, save the black-gloom overhead, the green-gloom of the

vast pine-forest, the grey sterility of the hills, to the north.

Towards the fifth hour, a sickly white flame darted forkedly out of the slate-hued sky to the northwest. There was no wind, no stir of any kind, following. The same breathless silence brooded everywhere.

Close upon the sixth hour a strange shivering went through a portion of the forest. It was as though the flank of a monster quivered. A confused rustling arose, ebbed, died away. Thrice at long intervals, the narrow, jagged flame lunged and thrust, as a needle thridding the two horizons. At a vast distance a wail, a murmur, a faint vanishing cry, might be heard, like the humming of a gnat. It was the wind, tearing and lashing the extreme frontiers, and screaming in its blind fury.

A raven came flying rapidly out of the west. Again and again in its undeviating flight its hoarse croak re-echoed as though it fell clanging from ledge to brazen ledge. At an immense height, three eagles, no larger than three pin-points, winging their way at terrific speed, seemed to crawl like ants along the blank slope of a summitless and endless wall.

In the southwest the greyness became involved. Dark masses bulged forward. A gigantic hand appeared to mould them from behind. The ponderous avalanches of rain were suspended, lifted, whirled this way and that, fused, divided, and swung low over the earth like horrible balloons of death.

Furtive eddies of wind moved stealthily among the forest-trees. The pines were motionless, though a thin song ascended spirally the columnar boles; but the near beeches were flooded with innumerable green wavelets of unquiet light. A constant tremor lived suspensive in ever birk, in every rowan. On the hither frontier of the pines a few scattered oaks lifted their upper boughs, lifted and lapsed, slowly lifted again and slowly lapsed. These were silent, though a confused murmur as of bewildered bees came from the foliage midway and beneath. Wan green tongues of air licked the fronds of the myriad bracken. Swift arrows of wind, narrow as reeds, darted through the fern and over the patches of grass, leaving for a moment a wake of white light. By a pool the bulrushes seemed to strain their tufty heads one way, listening; the tall, slim fairy-lances beside them continually trembled.

Suddenly there was an obscure noise upon the hills. Far off, a linn roared hoarsely, whose voice had been muffled before. Many streams and hill-torrents called. Then the mountain-wind came rushing down the strath, with incoherent shouts and a confused tumult of tidings. Every green thing moved one way, or stood back upon itself as a javelin-thrower. In the tragic silence of the forest and the moorland the pulse of the earth beat slowly, heavily. A suffocating grip was at the brown heart.

But the moment the hill-wind dashed through the swaying rowans and beeches, and leaped into the forest, a hurricane of cries arose. Every tree called to its neighbour; each pine shouted, screamed, moaned, or chanted a wild song; the more ancient lifted a deep voice, mocking and defiant. For now they knew what was coming.

The sea-tempest was climbing up over the back of the sun, and had already, with rolling thunders and frightful sulphurous blasts, with flame of many lightnings and vast volumes of cloud holding seas of rain and gravelly avalanches of hail, attacked, prostrated, trampled upon, mutilated, slain and twice slain, the far-off battalions of the forest! This was what the

herald of the hills proclaimed, as with panic haste he leaped through the woods screaming wild warnings as he went.

For leagues and leagues he swept onward, then, suddenly swerving, raced up a rock-bastioned height that rose in the forest. For a while he swung suspensive, then, swaying blindly, fell back stumbling, and, as one delirious, staggered to the forest again, and once more flew like a flying deer, though no longer forward but by the way he had come.

"The Tempest! The Tempest!" he screamed: "The Tempest comes!"

Soon all the forest knew what he had seen. Distant lines of great trees were being mowed down as by a scythe; gigantic pines were being torn from the ground and hurled hither and thither; the Black Loch had become a flood; the river had swollen into a frightful spate, and raged and ravened like a beast of prey. He had seen cattle fall, slain by lightning; a stag had crashed downwards as he leapt from boulder to boulder; the huts of some humans had been laid low, and the sprawling creatures beneath been killed or mutilated; sheep had been dashed up against stone-dykes and left lifeless-

The air in places was thick and dark with whirling grouse, snipe, wild-doves, lapwings, crows, and a dust of small birds.

A moan went up from the forest, — a new sound, horrible, full of awe, of terror, of despair. In the blank grey hollows of the mountains to the north the echo of this was as though the Grave were opened, and the Dead moaned.

Young and old moved near to each other, with clinging boughs, and tremulous sprays and branches. The fluttering leaves made a confused babble of tongues. The males swirled their upper boughs continuously, inclining their bodies now this way and now that. The ancient pines spread their boles as far as they could reach, murmuring low to their green offspring, and to the tender offspring of these. Sighs and sobs, swift admonitions, and sudden, passionate heart-break cries resounded. Death would be among them in a few moments; all could not survive, many must perish, patriarch and sapling, proud bridegroom and swaying bride, the withered and the strong.

From the extreme edge there was a constant emigration of living things. The birds sank among the bracken.

Some deer, three human males and a female, some foxes and stoats came out into the open, hesitated, and slowly retreated.

The first thunder-chariot now hurtled overhead. The charioteer leaned low, and thrust hither and thither with his frightful lance. A deer was killed, also the human female and one of the males. A scorching smell came from a spruce-fir; the next moment it hung in tongues of flame.

Then — silence: awful, appalling. Suddenly, the heaven opened in fire; the earth became a hollow globe of brass wherein an excruciating tumult whirled ruin against ruin. The howl of desolation seemed to belch at once from the entrails of the mountains and from the bowels of the bursting sky.

The Tempest was come!

II.

Mist.

A DENSE white mist lay upon the hills, clothing them from summit to base in a dripping shroud. The damp spongy peat everywhere sweated forth its overwelling ooze. Not a living thing seemed to haunt the desolation, though once or twice a faint cry from a bewildered curlew came stumblingly through the sodden atmosphere.

There was neither day nor night, but only the lifeless gloom of the endless, weary rain, thin, soaking, full of the chill and silence of the grave.

Hour lapsed into hour, till at last the gradual deepening of the mists betokened the dreary end of the dreary day. Soaked, boggy, treacherous as were the drenched and pool-haunted moors, no living thing, not even the restless hill-sheep, fared across them. But towards the late afternoon a stooping figure passed from

gloom to gloom, — wan, silent, making the awfulness of the hour and the place take on a new desolation.

As the shadow stole slowly across the moor, it stopped ever and anon. It was a man. The heavy moisture on his brow from the rain passing through his matted hair mixed with the great drops of sweat that gathered there continually. For as often as he stopped he heard footsteps anigh, footsteps in that lonely deserted place, — sometimes following, sometimes beyond him, sometimes almost at his side. Yet it was not for the sound of those following feet that he stopped, but because on the rain-matted cranberry-bushes or upon the glistening thyme or on the sodden grass, he saw now bloody foot-marks, now marks of bloody fingers. When he looked, there was nothing below or beyond him but the dull sheen of the rain-soaked herbage; when he looked again, a bloody footstep, a bloody finger-mark.

But at last the following feet were heard no more, the bloody imprints were no more seen. The man stood beside a deep tarn, and was looking into it, as the damned in hell look into their souls.

At times a faint, almost inaudible sigh breathed behind the mist in one direction. It was the hill-wind stirring among the scaurs and corries at a great height on a mountain to the north. Here and there, a slight drifting of the vapour disclosed a shadowy boulder: then the veils would lapse and intervolve, and the old impermeable obscurity prevail.

It was in one of these fugitive intervals that a stag, standing upon an overhanging rock, beheld another, a rival with whom it had fought almost to the death the day before. This second stag stood among the wet bracken, his ears now laid back, now extended quiveringly, his nostrils vibrating, as he strove to smell the something that moved through the dense mist by the tarn.

The upper stag tautened his haunches. His lips and nostrils curled, and left his yellow teeth agleam. The next moment he had launched himself upon his enemy. There was a crash, a sound as of a wind-lashed sea, sharp cries and panting breaths, groans. Then a long silence. Later, a single faint, perishing bleat came through the mist from the fern far up upon the hill.

The restless wind that was amid the summits

died. Night crept up from glen and strath; the veils of mist grew more and more obscure, more dark. At last, from the extreme peaks to where the torrent crawled into hollows in the sterile valley, there was a uniform pall of blackness.

In the chill, soaking silence not a thing stirred, not a sound was audible.

III.

Summer-sleep.

The high-road sinuated like a white snake, along the steeper slope of the valley. The vast expanse of the lowland lay basking in the July sunlight. In all directions woodlands, mostly of planes and oaks, swelled or lapsed in green billows.

The cuckoo had gone; the thrush was silent; blackbird and shilfa and linnet were now songless. But every here and there a lark still filled the summer air, as with the cool spray of aerial music; in the grain the corncrakes called; and, in shadowy places, in the twilight, the churring of a belated fern-owl was still a midsummer sweetness upon the ear.

The gloom of July was upon the trees. The oaks dreamed of green water. The limes were already displaying fugitive yellow banners. A red flush dusked the green-gloom of the sycamores. But by far the greater mass of the

woodlands consisted of planes; and these were now of a black green darker than that of north-wind waves on a day of storm. The meadows, too, lay in the shadow, as it were, even when the sun-flood poured upon them.

From the low ranges to the south a faint wind drifted leisurely northward. The sky was of a vivid blue, up whose invisible azure ledges a few rounded clouds, dazzling white or grey as swan's-down, climbed imperceptibly.

In the air was a pleasant murmur of the green world. The wild-bee and the wasp, the dragon-fly and the gnat, wrought everywhere a humming undertone. From copse and garth and water-meadow suspired an audible breath.

The lowing of kine from many steadings blended with the continuous murmur of a weir, where the river curved under ancient alders and slipped into a dense green shaw of birches beyond an old water-mill, whose vast black wheel, jagged and broken, swung slowly, fanning the hot air so that it made a haze as of faint-falling rain.

Peace was upon the land, and beauty. The languor of dream gave the late summer a loveliness that was all its own, — as of a fair woman,

asleep, dreaming of the lover who has not long left her, and the touch of whose lips is still warm upon her mouth and hair.

Along the high-road, where it made a sweep southwestward, and led to a small hamlet of thatched, white-walled cottages, three men walked. The long fantastic shadows which they cast were pale blue upon the chalky dust of the road, and leaped and contracted and slid stealthily forward with wearisome, monotonous energy. Two of the men were tall and fair; one dark, loosely built, and of a smaller and slighter build.

"There is my home," said the tallest wayfarer suddenly, after what had been a long silence; and as he spoke he pointed to a small square house set among orchard-trees, a stone's throw from the hamlet.

"It is a beautiful place," replied his comrade, slowly, "and I envy you."

"Yes, indeed," added the other.

"I am glad you think so," the owner of the house answered quietly.

But the three shadows leapt to one side, moved with fantastic steps, and seemed convulsed with laughter.

Perhaps the tall shiver-grass that rose by the wayside out of the garth of campions and purple scabious could catch the attenuated sounds and understand the speech of the shadows. If so, it would know that the taller of the two strangers said in his heart: —

"There is something of awe, of terror about that house; nay, the whole land here is under a tragic gloom. I should die here, stifled. I am glad I go on the morrow."

It would know that the smaller and darker of the two strangers said in his heart: —

"It may all be beautiful and peaceful, but something tragic hides behind this flooding sunlight, behind these dark woodlands, down by the water-course there, past the water-mill, up by that house among the orchard-trees."

It would know that the tallest of the three men, he who lived in that square cottage by the pleasant hamlet, said in his heart: —

"It may be that the gate of hell is hidden there among the grass, or beneath the foundations of my house. Would God I were free! O my God, madness and death!"

Then, after another long silence, as the three wayfarers drew near, the dark man murmured

his pleasure at the comely hamlet, at the quiet land lying warm in the afternoon glow. And his companion said that rest and coolness would be welcome, and doubly so in so fair and peaceful a home. And the tallest of the three, he who owned the house in the orchard, laughed blithely. And all three moved onward, with quickened steps, through the hot, sweet, dusty afternoon, golden now with the waning sun-glow.

IV

THE ANOINTED MAN.

THE DÀN–NAN–RÒN.

GREEN BRANCHES.

The Anointed Man.

Of the seven Achannas — sons of Robert Achanna of Achanna in Galloway, self-exiled in the far north because of a bitter feud with his kindred — who lived upon Eilanmore in the Summer Isles, there was not one who was not, in more or less degree, or at some time or other, fëy.

Doubtless I shall have occasion to allude to one and all again, and certainly to the eldest and youngest; for they were the strangest folk I have known or met anywhere in the Celtic lands, from the sea-pastures of the Solway to the kelp-strewn beaches of Lewis. Upon James, the seventh son, the doom of his people fell last and most heavily. Some day I may tell the full story of his strange life and tragic undoing, and of his piteous end. As it hap-

pened, I knew best the eldest and youngest of the brothers, Alison and James. Of the others, Robert, Allan, William, Marcus, and Gloom, none save the last-named survives, if peradventure *he* does, or has been seen of man for many years past. Of Gloom (strange and unaccountable name, which used to terrify me, the more so as by the savagery of fate it was the name of all names suitable for Robert Achanna's sixth son) I know nothing beyond the fact that ten years or more ago he was a Jesuit priest in Rome, a bird of passage, whence come and whither bound no inquiries of mine could discover. Two years ago a relative told me that Gloom was dead, that he had been slain by some Mexican noble in an old city of Hispaniola beyond the seas. Doubtless the news was founded on truth, though I have ever a vague unrest when I think of Gloom, as though he were travelling hitherward, — as though his feet, on some urgent errand, were already white with the dust of the road that leads to my house.

But now I wish to speak only of Alison Achanna. He was a friend whom I loved, though he was a man of close on forty and I a

girl less than half his years. We had much in common, and I never knew any one more companionable, for all that he was called "Silent Ally." He was tall, gaunt, loosely-built. His eyes were of that misty blue which smoke takes when it rises in the woods. I used to think them like the tarns that lay amid the canna and gale-surrounded swamps in Uist, where I was wont to dream as a child.

I had often noticed the light on his face when he smiled, a light of such serene joy as young mothers have sometimes over the cradles of their firstborn. But, for some reason, I had never wondered about it, not even when I heard and understood the half-contemptuous, half-reverent mockery with which not only Alison's brothers but even his father at times used towards him. Once, I remember, I was puzzled when, on a bleak day in a stormy August, I overheard Gloom say, angrily and scoffingly, "There goes the Anointed Man!" I looked; but all I could see was, that, despite the dreary cold, despite the ruined harvest, despite the rotting potato-crop, Alison walked slowly onward, smiling, and with glad eyes brooding upon the grey lands around and beyond him.

It was nearly a year thereafter — I remember the date, because it was that of my last visit to Eilanmore — that I understood more fully. I was walking westward with Alison, towards sundown. The light was upon his face as though it came from within; and when I looked again, half in awe, I saw that there was no glamour out of the west, for the evening was dull and threatening rain. He was in sorrow. Three months before, his brothers, Allan and William, had been drowned; a month later, his brother Robert had sickened, and now sat in the ingle from morning till the covering of the peats, a skeleton almost, shivering, and morosely silent, with large staring eyes. On the large bed, in the room above the kitchen, old Robert Achanna lay, stricken with paralysis It would have been unendurable for me, but for Alison and James, and, above all, for my loved girl-friend, Anne Gillespie, Achanna's niece and the sunshine of his gloomy household.

As I walked with Alison I was conscious of a well-nigh intolerable depression. The house we had left was so mournful; the bleak, sodden pastures were so mournful; so mournful was the stony place we were crossing, silent but for

the thin crying of the curlews; and above all so mournful was the sound of the ocean as, unseen, it moved sobbingly round the isle, — so beyond words distressing was all this to me that I stopped abruptly, meaning to go no farther, but to return to the house, where, at least, there was warmth, and where Anne would sing for me as she spun.

But when I looked up into my companion's face I saw in truth the light that shone from within. His eyes were upon a forbidding stretch of ground, where the blighted potatoes rotted among a wilderness of round skull-white stones. I remember them still, these strange far-blue eyes; lamps of quiet joy, lamps of peace, they seemed to me.

"Are you looking at Achnacarn?" (as the tract was called), I asked, in what I am sure was a whisper.

"Yes," replied Alison, slowly; "I am looking. It is beautiful, beautiful; O God, how beautiful is this lovely world!"

I know not what made me act so, but I threw myself on a heathery ridge close by, and broke out into convulsive sobbings.

Alison stooped, lifted me in his strong arms,

and soothed me with soft caressing touches and quieting words.

"Tell me, my fawn, what is it? What is the trouble?" he asked again and again.

"It is *you* — it is *you*, Alison," I managed to say coherently at last; "it terrifies me to hear you speak as you did a little ago. You must be fëy. Why, why, do you call that hateful, hideous field beautiful — on this dreary day — and, — and after all that has happened, — oh, Alison?"

At this, I remember, he took his plaid and put it upon the wet heather, and then drew me thither, and seated himself and me beside him.

"Is it not beautiful, my fawn?" he asked, with tears in his eyes. Then, without waiting for my answer, he said quietly, "Listen, dear, and I will tell you."

He was strangely still, breathless he seemed to me, for a minute or more. Then he spoke: —

"I was little more than a child, a boy just in my teens, when something happened, something that came down the Rainbow-Arches of Cathair-Sìth." He paused here, perhaps to see if I followed, which I did, familiar as I was with all fairy-lore. "I was out upon the heather, in the time when the honey oozes in the bells and

cups. I had always loved the island and the sea. Perhaps I was foolish, but I was so glad with my joy that golden day that I threw myself on the ground and kissed the hot, sweet-ling, and put my hands and arms into it, sobbing the while with my vague, strange yearning. At last I lay still, nerveless, with my eyes closed. Suddenly I was aware that two tiny hands had come up through the spires of the heather, and were pressing something soft and fragrant upon my eyelids. When I opened them, I could see nothing unfamiliar. No one was visible. But I heard a whisper: 'Arise and go away from this place at once; and this night do not venture out, lest evil befall you.' So I rose, trembling, and went home. Thereafter I was the same, and yet not the same. Never could I see, as they saw, what my father and brothers or the islefolk looked upon as ugly or dreary. My father was wroth with me many times, and called me a fool. Whenever my eyes fell upon those waste and desolated spots, they seemed to me passing fair, radiant with lovely light. At last my father grew so bitter that, mocking me the while, he bade me go to the towns, and see there the squalor and sordid hideousness wherein

men dwelled. But thus it was with me: in the places they call slums, and among the smoke of factories, and the grime of destitution, I could see all that other men saw, only as vanishing shadows. What I saw was lovely, beautiful with strange glory, and the faces of men and women were sweet and pure, and their souls were white. So, weary and bewildered with my unwilling quest, I came back to Eilanmore. And on the day of my home-coming, Morag was there, — Morag of the Falls. She turned to my father, and called him blind and foolish. 'He has the white light upon his brows,' she said of me; 'I can see it, like the flicker-light in a wave when the wind's from the south in thunder-weather. He has been touched with the Fairy Ointment. The Guid Folk know him. It will be thus with him till the day of his death, if a *duinshee* can die, being already a man dead yet born anew. He upon whom the Fairy Ointment has been laid must see all that is ugly and hideous and dreary and bitter through a glamour of beauty. Thus it hath been since the Mhic-Alpine ruled from sea to sea, and thus is it with the man Alison your son.'

"That is all, my fawn, and, that is why my brothers, when they are angry, sometimes call me the Anointed Man."

"That is all." Yes perhaps. But oh, Alison Achanna, how often have I thought of that most precious treasure you found in the heather, when the bells were sweet with honey-ooze! Did the wild bees know of it? Would that I could hear the soft hum of their gauzy wings!

Who of us would not barter the best of all our possessions — and some there are who would surrender all — to have one touch laid upon the eyelids, one touch of the Fairy Ointment? But the place is far, and the hour is hidden. No man may seek that for which there can be no quest.

Only the wild bees know of it, but I think they must be the bees of Magh-Mell. And there no man that liveth may wayfare — yet.

The Dàn-nan-Ròn.

WHEN Anne Gillespie, that was my friend in Eilanmore, left the island after the death of her uncle, the old man Robert Achanna, it was to go far west.

Among the men of the Outer Isles who for three summers past had been at the fishing off Eilanmore there was one named Mànus MacCodrum. He was a fine lad to see, but though most of the fisher-folk of the Lewis and North Uist are fair, either with reddish hair and grey eyes, or blue-eyed and yellow-haired, he was of a brown skin with dark hair and dusky brown eyes. He was, however, as unlike to the dark Celts of Arran and the Inner Hebrides as to the northmen. He came of his people, sure enough. All the MacCodrums of North Uist

had been brown-skinned and brown-haired and brown-eyed: and herein may have lain the reason why, in by-gone days, this small clan of Uist was known throughout the Western Isles as the *Sliochd nan Ròn*, the offspring of the Seals.

Not so tall as most of the North Uist and Long Island men, Mànus MacCodrum was of a fair height, and supple and strong. No man was a better fisherman than he, and he was well liked of his fellows, for all the morose gloom that was upon him at times. He had a voice as sweet as a woman's when he sang, and he sang often, and knew all the old runes of the islands, from the Obb of Harris to the Head of Mingulay. Often, too, he chanted the beautiful *orain spioradail* of the Catholic priests and Christian Brothers of South Uist and Barra, though where he lived in North Uist he was the sole man who adhered to the ancient faith.

It may have been because Anne was a Catholic too, though, sure, the Achannas were so also, notwithstanding that their forebears and kindred in Galloway were Protestant (and this because of old Robert Achanna's love for his wife, who was of the old Faith, so it is said), — it may have

been for this reason, though I think her lover's admiring eyes and soft speech and sweet singing had more to do with it, that she pledged her troth to Mànus. It was a south wind for him as the saying is; for with her rippling brown hair and soft, grey eyes and cream-white skin, there was no comelier lass in the isles.

So when Achanna was laid to his long rest, and there was none left upon Eilanmore save only his three youngest sons, Mànus MacCodrum sailed north-eastward across the Minch to take home his bride. Of the four eldest sons, Alison had left Eilanmore some months before his father died, and sailed westward, though no one knew whither or for what end or for how long, and no word had been brought from him, nor was he ever seen again in the island which had come to be called Eilan-nan-Allmharachain, the Isle of the Strangers; Allan and William had been drowned in a wild gale in the Minch; and Robert had died of the white fever, that deadly wasting disease which is the scourge of the isles. Marcus was now "Eilanmore," and lived there with Gloom and Sheumais, all three unmarried, though it was rumoured among the

neighbouring islanders that each loved Marsail nic Ailpean,[1] in Eilean-Rona of the Summer Isles hard by the coast of Sutherland.

When Mànus asked Anne to go with him she agreed. The three brothers were ill-pleased at this, for apart from their not wishing their cousin to go so far away, they did not want to lose her, as she not only cooked for them and did all that a woman does, including spinning and weaving, but was most sweet and fair to see, and in the long winter nights sang by the hour together, while Gloom played strange wild airs upon his *feadan*, a kind of oaten pipe or flute.

She loved him, I know; but there was this reason also for her going, that she was afraid of Gloom. Often upon the moor or on the hill she turned and hastened home, because she heard the lilt and fall of that *feadan*. It was an eerie thing to her, to be going through the twilight when she thought the three men were in the house, smoking after their supper, and suddenly to hear beyond and coming towards her the shrill song of that oaten flute, playing

[1] Marsail nic Ailpean is the Gaelic of which an English translation would be Marjory MacAlpine. *Nic* is a contraction for *nighean mhic*, "daughter of the line of."

"The Dance of the Dead," or "The Flow and Ebb," or "The Shadow-Reel."

That, sometimes at least, he knew she was there was clear to her, because, as she stole rapidly through the tangled fern and gale, she would hear a mocking laugh follow her like a leaping thing.

Mànus was not there on the night when she told Marcus and his brothers that she was going. He was in the haven on board the *Luath*, with his two mates, he singing in the moonshine as all three sat mending their fishing gear.

After the supper was done, the three brothers sat smoking and talking over an offer that had been made about some Shetland sheep. For a time, Anne watched them in silence. They were not like brothers, she thought. Marcus, tall, broad-shouldered, with yellow hair and strangely dark blue-black eyes and black eyebrows; stern, with a weary look on his sun-brown face. The light from the peats glinted upon the tawny curve of thick hair that trailed from his upper lip, for he had the *caisean-feusag* of the Northmen. Gloom, slighter of build, dark of hue and hair, but with hairless face; with thin, white, long-fingered hands that had ever a nervous motion, as though

they were tide-wrack. There was always a frown on the centre of his forehead, even when he smiled with his thin lips and dusky, unbetraying eyes. He looked what he was, the brain of the Achannas. Not only did he have the English as though native to that tongue, but could and did read strange unnecessary books. Moreover, he was the only son of Robert Achanna to whom the old man had imparted his store of learning, for Achanna had been a schoolmaster in his youth, in Galloway, and he had intended Gloom for the priesthood. His voice, too, was low and clear, but cold as pale-green water running under ice. As for Sheumais, he was more like Marcus than Gloom, though not so fair. He had the same brown hair and shadowy hazel eyes, the same pale and smooth face, with something of the same intent look which characterised the long-time missing, and probably dead, eldest brother, Alison. He, too, was tall and gaunt. On Sheumais' face there was that indescribable, as to some of course imperceptible look, which is indicated by the phrase, "the dusk of the shadow," though few there are who know what they mean by that, or, knowing, are fain to say.

Suddenly, and without any word or reason for it, Gloom turned and spoke to her.

"Well, Anne, and what is it?"

"I did not speak, Gloom."

"True for you, *mo cailinn*. But it 's about to speak you were."

"Well, and that is true. Marcus, and you Gloom, and you Sheumais, I have that to tell which you will not be altogether glad for the hearing. 'T is about — about — me and — and Mànus."

There was no reply at first. The three brothers sat looking at her like the kye at a stranger on the moorland. There was a deepening of the frown on Gloom's brow, but when Anne looked at him his eyes fell and dwelt in the shadow at his feet. Then Marcus spoke in a low voice.

"Is it Mànus MacCodrum you will be meaning?"

"Ay, sure."

Again, silence. Gloom did not lift his eyes, and Sheumais was now staring at the peats. Marcus shifted uneasily.

"And what will Mànus MacCodrum be wanting?"

"Sure, Marcus, you know well what I mean.

Why do you make this thing hard for me? There is but one thing he would come here wanting. And he has asked me if I will go with him; and I have said yes; and if you are not willing that he come again with the minister, or that we go across to the kirk in Berneray of Uist in the Sound of Harris, then I will not stay under this roof another night, but will go away from Eilamore at sunrise in the *Luath*, that is now in the haven. And that is for the hearing and knowing, Marcus and Gloom and Sheumais!"

Once more, silence followed her speaking. It was broken in a strange way. Gloom slipped his *feadan* into his hands, and so to his mouth. The clear, cold notes of the flute filled the flame-lit room. It was as though white polar birds were drifting before the coming of snow.

The notes slid into a wild, remote air: cold moonlight on the dark o' the sea, it was. It was the "*Dàn-nan-Ròn*."

Anne flushed, trembled, and then abruptly rose. As she leaned on her clenched right hand upon the table, the light of the peats showed that her eyes were aflame.

"Why do you play *that*, Gloom Achanna?"

The man finished the bar, then blew into the oaten pipe, before, just glancing at the girl, he replied:

"And what harm will there be in *that*, Anna-ban?"

"You know it is harm. That is the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'!"

"Ay, and what then, Anna-ban?"

"What then? Are you thinking I don't know what you mean by playing the 'Song o' the Seals'?"

With an abrupt gesture Gloom put the *feadan* aside. As he did so, he rose.

"See here, Anne," he began roughly, when Marcus intervened.

"That will do just now, Gloom. Anne-à-ghraidh, do you mean that you are going to do this thing?"

"Ay, sure."

"Do you know why Gloom played the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'?"

"It was a cruel thing."

"You know what is said in the isles about — about — this or that man, who is under *gheasan*, who is spell-bound and — and — about the seals and — "

"Yes, Marcus, it is knowing it that I am: '*Tha iad a' cantuinn gur h-e daoine fo gheasan a th' anns no roin.*'"

"'*They say that seals*,'" he repeated slowly, "'*They say that seals are men under magic spells.*' And have you ever pondered that thing, Anne, my cousin?"

"I am knowing well what you mean."

"Then you will know that the MacCodrums of North Uist are called the *Sliochd-nan-Ròn*?"

"I have heard."

"And would you be for marrying a man that is of the race of the beasts, and that himself knows what *geas* means, and may any day go back to his people?"

"Ah, now, Marcus, sure it is making a mock of me you are. Neither you nor any here believes that foolish thing. How can a man born of a woman be a seal, even though his *sinnsear* were the offspring of the sea-people, which is not a saying I am believing either, though it may be; and not that it matters much, whatever, about the far-back forbears."

Marcus frowned darkly, and at first made no response. At last he answered, speaking sullenly.

"You may be believing this or you may be believing that, Anna-nic-Gilleasbuig, but two things are as well known as that the east wind brings the blight and the west wind the rain. And one is this: that long ago a Seal-man wedded a woman of North Uist, and that he or his son was called Neil MacCodrum; and that the sea-fever of the seal was in the blood of his line ever after. And this is the other: that twice within the memory of living folk, a MacCodrum has taken upon himself the form of a seal, and has so met his death, once Neil MacCodrum of Ru' Tormaid, and once Anndra MacCodrum of Berneray in the Sound. There's talk of others, but these are known of us all. And you will not be forgetting now that Neil-donn was the grandfather, and that Anndra was the brother of the father of Mànus MacCodrum?"

"I am not caring what you say, Marcus. It is all foam of the sea."

"There's no foam without wind or tide, Anne, an' it's a dark tide that will be bearing you away to Uist, and a black wind that will be blowing far away behind the East, the wind that will be carrying his death-cry to your ears."

The girl shuddered. The brave spirit in her, however, did not quail.

"Well, so be it. To each his fate. But, seal or no seal, I am going to wed Mànus MacCodrum, who is a man as good as any here, and a true man at that, and the man I love, and that will be my man, God willing, the praise be His!"

Again Gloom took up the *feadan*, and sent a few cold, white notes floating through the hot room, breaking, suddenly, into the wild, fantastic, opening air of the "Dàn-nan-Ròn."

With a low cry and passionate gesture Anne sprang forward, snatched the oat-flute from his grasp, and would have thrown it in the fire. Marcus held her in an iron grip, however.

"Don't you be minding Gloom, Anne," he said quietly, as he took the *feadan* from her hand and handed it to his brother: "sure he's only telling you in *his* way what I am telling you in mine."

She shook herself free, and moved to the other side of the table. On the opposite wall hung the dirk which had belonged to old Achanna. This she unfastened. Holding it in her right hand, she faced the three men.

"On the cross of the dirk I swear I will be the woman of Mànus MacCodrum."

The brothers made no response. They looked at her fixedly.

"And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if any man come between me and Mànus, this dirk will be for his remembering in a certain hour of the day of the days."

As she spoke, she looked meaningly at Gloom, whom she feared more than Marcus or Sheumais.

"And by the cross of the dirk I swear that if evil come to Mànus, this dirk will have another sheath, and that will be my milkless breast; and by that token I now throw the old sheath in the fire."

As she finished, she threw the sheath on to the burning peats. Gloom quietly lifted it, brushed off the sparks of flame as though they were dust, and put it in his pocket.

"And by the same token, Anne," he said, "your oaths will come to nought."

Rising, he made a sign to his brothers to follow. When they were outside he told Sheumais to return, and to keep Anne within, by peace if possible, by force if not. Briefly they discussed

their plans, and then separated. While Sheumais went back, Marcus and Gloom made their way to the haven.

Their black figures were visible in the moonlight, but at first they were not noticed by the men on board the *Luath*, for Mànus was singing.

When the isleman stopped abruptly, one of his companions asked him jokingly if his song had brought a seal alongside, and bid him beware lest it was a woman of the sea-people.

He gloomed morosely, but made no reply. When the others listened, they heard the wild strain of the "Dàn-nan-Ròn" stealing through the moonshine. Staring against the shore, they could discern the two brothers.

"What will be the meaning of that?" asked one of the men, uneasily.

"When a man comes instead of a woman," answered Mànus, slowly, "the young corbies are astir in the nest."

So, it meant blood. Aulay MacNeil and Donull MacDonull put down their gear, rose, and stood waiting for what Mànus would do.

"Ho, there!" he cried.

"Ho-ro!"

"What will you be wanting, Eilanmore?"

"We are wanting a word of you, Mànus Mac-Codrum. Will you come ashore?"

"If you want a word of me, you can come to me."

"There is no boat here."

"I 'll send the *bàta-beag*."

When he had spoken, Mànus asked Donull, the younger of his mates, a lad of seventeen, to row to the shore.

"And bring back no more than one man," he added, "whether it be Eilanmore himself or Gloom-mhic-Achanna."

The rope of the small boat was unfastened, and Donull rowed it swiftly through the moonshine. The passing of a cloud dusked the shore, but they saw him throw a rope for the guiding of the boat alongside the ledge of the landing-place; then the sudden darkening obscured the vision. Donull must be talking, they thought, for two or three minutes elapsed without sign, but at last the boat put off again, and with two figures only. Doubtless the lad had had to argue against the coming of both Marcus and Gloom.

This, in truth, was what Donull had done.

But while he was speaking Marcus was staring fixedly beyond him.

"Who is it that is there?" he asked, "there, in the stern?"

"There is no one there."

"I thought I saw the shadow of a man."

"Then it was my shadow, Eilanmore."

Achanna turned to his brother.

"I see a man's death there in the boat."

Gloom quailed for a moment, then laughed low.

"I see no death of a man sitting in the boat, Marcus, but if I did I am thinking it would dance to the air of the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn,' which is more than the wraith of you or me would do."

"It is not a wraith I was seeing, but the death of a man."

Gloom whispered, and his brother nodded sullenly. The next moment a heavy muffler was round Donull's mouth; and before he could resist, or even guess what had happened, he was on his face on the shore, bound and gagged. A minute later the oars were taken by Gloom, and the boat moved swiftly out of the inner haven.

As it drew near through the gloom Mànus stared at it intently.

"That is not Donull that is rowing, Aulay!"

"No: it will be Gloom Achanna, I 'm thinking."

MacCodrum started. If so, that other figure at the stern was too big for Donull. The cloud passed just as the boat came alongside. The rope was made secure, and then Marcus and Gloom sprang on board.

"Where is Donull MacDonull?" demanded Mànus sharply.

Marcus made no reply, so Gloom answered for him.

"He has gone up to the house with a message to Anne-nic-Gilleasbuig."

"And what will that message be?"

"That Mànus MacCodrum has sailed away from Eilanmore, and will not see her again."

MacCodrum laughed. It was a low, ugly laugh.

"Sure, Gloom Achanna, you should be taking that *feadan* of yours and playing the *Codhail-nan-Pairtean*, for I 'm thinkin' the crabs are gathering about the rocks down below us, an' laughing wi' their claws."

"Well, and that is a true thing," Gloom replied slowly and quietly. "Yes, for sure I might, as you say, be playing the 'Meeting of the Crabs.' Perhaps," he added, as by a sudden afterthought, "perhaps, though it is a calm night, you will be hearing the *comh-thonn*. The 'slapping of the waves' is a better thing to be hearing than the 'Meeting of the Crabs.'"

"If I hear the *comh-thonn* it is not in the way you will be meaning, Gloom 'ic Achanna. 'T is not the 'up sail and good-bye' they will be saying, but 'Home wi' the Bride.'"

Here Marcus intervened.

"Let us be having no more words, Mànus MacCodrum. The girl Anne is not for you. Gloom is to be her man. So get you hence. If you will be going quiet, it is quiet we will be. If you have your feet on this thing, then you will be having that too which I saw in the boat."

"And what was it you saw in the boat, Achanna?"

"The death of a man."

"So—. And now" (this after a prolonged silence, wherein the four men stood facing each other) "is it a blood-matter if not of peace?"

"Ay. Go, if you are wise. If not, 't is your own death you will be making."

There was a flash as of summer lightning. A bluish flame seemed to leap through the moonshine. Marcus reeled, with a gasping cry; then, leaning back, till his face blanched in the moonlight, his knees gave way. As he fell, he turned half round. The long knife which Mànus had hurled at him had not penetrated his breast more than two inches at most, but as he fell on the deck it was driven into him up to the hilt.

In the blank silence that followed, the three men could hear a sound like the ebb-tide in seaweed. It was the gurgling of the bloody froth in the lungs of the dead man.

The first to speak was his brother, and then only when thin reddish-white foam-bubbles began to burst from the blue lips of Marcus.

"It is murder."

He spoke low, but it was like the surf of breakers in the ears of those who heard.

"You have said one part of a true word, Gloom Achanna. It is murder — that you and he came here for!"

"The death of Marcus Achanna is on you, Mànus MacCodrum."

"So be it, as between yourself and me, or between all of your blood and me; though Aulay MacNeil as well as you can witness that though in self-defence I threw the knife at Achanna, it was his own doing that drove it into him."

"You can whisper that to the rope when it is round your neck."

"And what will *you* be doing now, Gloom Nic Achanna?"

For the first time Gloom shifted uneasily. A swift glance revealed to him the awkward fact that the boat trailed behind the *Luath*, so that he could not leap into it, while if he turned to haul it close by the rope he was at the mercy of the two men.

"I will go in peace," he said quietly.

"Ay," was the answer, in an equally quiet tone, "in the white peace."

Upon this menace of death the two men stood facing each other.

Achanna broke the silence at last.

"You'll hear the 'Dân-nan-Ròn' the night before you die, Mànus MacCodrum, and lest you doubt it you'll hear it again in your death-hour."

"*Ma tha sin an Dàn*, — if that be ordained." Mànus spoke gravely. His very quietude, however, boded ill. There was no hope of clemency; Gloom knew that.

Suddenly he laughed scornfully. Then, pointing with his right hand as if to some one behind his two adversaries, he cried out: "Put the death-hand on them, Marcus! Give them the Grave!" Both men sprang aside, the heart of each nigh upon bursting. The death-touch of the newly slain is an awful thing to incur, for it means that the wraith can transfer all its evil to the person touched.

The next moment there was a heavy splash. In a second Mànus realised that it was no more than a ruse, and that Gloom had escaped. With feverish haste he hauled in the small boat, leaped into it, and began at once to row so as to intercept his enemy.

Achanna rose once, between him and the *Luath*. MacCodrum crossed the oars in the thole-pins and seized the boat-hook.

The swimmer kept straight for him. Suddenly he dived. In a flash, Mànus realised that Gloom was going to rise under the boat, seize the keel, and upset him, and thus probably

be able to grip him from above. There was time and no more to leap; and, indeed, scarce had he plunged into the sea ere the boat swung right over, Achanna clambering over it the next moment.

At first Gloom could not see where his foe was. He crouched on the upturned craft, and peered eagerly into the moonlit water. All at once a black mass shot out of the shadow between him and the smack. This black mass laughed, — the same low, ugly laugh that had preceded the death of Marcus.

He who was in turn the swimmer was now close. When a fathom away he leaned back and began to tread water steadily. In his right hand he grasped the boat-hook. The man in the boat knew that to stay where he was meant certain death. He gathered himself together like a crouching cat. Mànus kept treading the water slowly, but with the hook ready so that the sharp iron spike at the end of it should transfix his foe if he came at him with a leap. Now and again he laughed. Then in his low sweet voice, but brokenly at times between his deep breathings, he began to sing:

The tide was dark, an' heavy with the burden that it bore;
I heard it talkin', whisperin', upon the weedy shore;
Each wave that stirred the sea-weed was like a closing door;
'T is closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,
My Grief,
No more!

The tide was in the salt sea-weed, and like a knife it tore;
The wild sea-wind went moaning, sooing, moaning o'er and o'er;
The deep sea-heart was brooding deep upon its ancient lore,—
I heard the sob, the sooing sob, the dying sob at its core,
My Grief,
Its core!

The white sea-waves were wan and grey its ashy lips before,
The yeast within its ravening mouth was red with streaming gore;
O red sea-weed, O red sea-waves, O hollow baffled roar,
Since one thou hast, O dark dim Sea, why callest thou for more,
My Grief,
For more!

In the quiet moonlight the chant, with its long, slow cadences, sung as no other man in the isles could sing it, sounded sweet and remote beyond

the water of the haven, and moved in waving words to tell. The glittering shine was upon lines of fire along the stone ledges. Sometimes a fish rose, and spilt a ripple of pale gold; or a sea-nettle swam to the surface, and turned its blue or greenish globe of living jelly to the moon dazzle.

The man in the water made a sudden stop in his treading, and listened intently. Then once more the phosphorescent light gleamed about his slow-moving shoulders. In a louder chanting voice came once again,

Each wave that stirs the sea-weed is like a closing door;
'T is closing doors they hear at last who hear no more, no more,
My Grief,
No more!

Yes, his quick ears had caught the inland strain of a voice he knew. Soft and white as the moonshine came Anne's singing as she passed along the corrie leading to the haven. In vain his travelling gaze sought her; she was still in the shadow, and, besides, a slow drifting cloud obscured the moonlight. When he looked back again a stifled exclamation came from his

lips. There was not a sign of Gloom Achanna. He had slipped noiselessly from the boat, and was now either behind it, or had dived beneath it, or was swimming under water this way or that. If only the cloud would sail by, muttered Mànus, as he held himself in readiness for an attack from beneath or behind. As the dusk lightened, he swam slowly towards the boat, and then swiftly round it. There was no one there. He climbed on to the keel, and stood, leaning forward, as a salmon-leisterer by torchlight, with his spear-pointed boat-hook raised. Neither below nor beyond could he discern any shape. A whispered call to Aulay MacNeil showed that he, too, saw nothing. Gloom must have swooned, and sank deep as he slipped through the water. Perhaps the dog-fish were already darting about him.

Going behind the boat Mànus guided it back to the smack. It was not long before, with MacNeil's help, he righted the punt. One oar had drifted out of sight, but as there was a sculling-hole in the stern that did not matter.

"What shall we do with it?" he muttered, as he stood at last by the corpse of Marcus. "This is a bad night for us, Aulay!"

"Bad it is; but let us be seeing it is not worse. I'm thinking we should have left the boat."

"And for why that?"

"We could say that Marcus Achanna and Gloom Achanna left us again, and that we saw no more of them nor of our boat."

MacCodrum pondered a while. The sound of voices, borne faintly across the water, decided him. Probably Anne and the lad Donull were talking. He slipped into the boat, and with a sail-knife soon ripped it here and there. It filled, and then, heavy with the weight of a great ballast-stone which Aulay had first handed to his companion, and surging with a foot-thrust from the latter, it sank.

"We'll hide the — the man there — behind the windlass, below the spare sail, till we're out at sea, Aulay. Quick, give me a hand!"

It did not take the two men long to lift the corpse, and do as Mànus had suggested. They had scarce accomplished this, when Anne's voice came hailing silver-sweet across the water.

With death-white face and shaking limbs, MacCodrum stood holding the mast, while with a loud voice, so firm and strong that Aulay

MacNeil smiled below his fear, he asked if the Achannas were back yet, and if so for Donull to row out at once, and she with him if she would come.

It was nearly half an hour thereafter that Anne rowed out towards the *Luath*. She had gone at last along the shore to a creek where one of Marcus' boats was moored and returned with it. Having taken Donull on board, she made way with all speed, fearful lest Gloom or Marcus should intercept her.

It did not take long to explain how she had laughed at Sheumais' vain efforts to detain her, and had come down to the haven. As she approached, she heard Mànus singing, and so had herself broken into a song she knew he loved. Then, by the water-edge she had come upon Donull lying upon his back, bound and gagged. After she had released him they waited to see what would happen, but as in the moonlight they could not see any small boat come in, bound to or from the smack, she had hailed to know if Mànus were there.

On his side he said briefly that the two Achannas had come to persuade him to leave without her. On his refusal they had departed again,

uttering threats against her as well as himself. He heard their quarrelling voices as they rowed into the gloom, but could not see them at last because of the obscured moonlight.

"And now, Ann-mochree," he added, "is it coming with me you are, and just as you are? Sure, you 'll never repent it, and you 'll have all you want that I can give. Dear of my heart, say that you will be coming away this night of the nights! By the Black Stone on Icolmkill I swear it, and by the Sun, and by the Moon, and by Himself!"

"I am trusting you, Mànus dear. Sure it is not for me to be going back to that house after what has been done and said. I go with you, now and always, God save us."

"Well, dear lass o' my heart, it 's farewell to Eilanmore it is, for by the Blood on the Cross I 'll never land on it again!"

"And that will be no sorrow to me, Mànus my home!"

And this was the way that my friend Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore to go to the isles of the west.

It was a fair sailing, in the white moonshine,

with a whispering breeze astern. Anne leaned against Mànus, dreaming her dream. The lad Donull sat drowsing at the helm. Forward, Aulay MacNeil, with his face set against the moonshine to the west, brooded dark.

Though no longer was land in sight, and there was peace among the deeps of the quiet stars and upon the sea, the shadow of fear was upon the face of Mànus MacCodrum.

This might well have been because of the as yet unburied dead that lay beneath the spare sail by the windlass. The dead man, however, did not affright him. What went moaning in his heart, and sighing and calling in his brain, was a faint falling echo he had heard, as the *Luath* glided slow out of the haven. Whether from the water or from the shore he could not tell, but he heard the wild, fantastic air of the "Dàn-nan-Ròn," as he had heard it that very night upon the *feadan* of Gloom Achanna.

It was his hope that his ears had played him false. When he glanced about him, and saw the sombre flame in the eyes of Aulay MacNeil, staring at him out of the dusk, he knew that which Oisìn the son of Fionn cried in his pain. His soul swam in mist.

II.

For all the evil omens, the marriage of Anne and Mànus MacCodrum went well. He was more silent than of yore, and men avoided rather than sought him; but he was happy with Anne, and content with his two mates, who were now Callum MacCodrum and Ranald MacRanald. The youth Donull had bettered himself by joining a Skye skipper who was a kinsman, and Aulay MacNeil had surprised every one, except Mànus, by going away as a seaman on board one of the *Loch* line of ships which sail for Australia from the Clyde.

Anne never knew what had happened, though it is possible she suspected somewhat. All that was known to her was that Marcus and Gloom Achanna had disappeared, and were supposed to have been drowned. There was now no Achanna upon Eilanmore, for Sheumais had taken a horror of the place and his loneliness. As soon as it was commonly admitted that his two brothers must have drifted

out to sea, and been drowned, or at best picked up by some ocean-going ship, he disposed of the island-farm, and left Eilanmore forever. All this confirmed the thing said among the islanders of the west, that old Robert Achanna had brought a curse with him. Blight and disaster had visited Eilanmore over and over in the many years he had held it, and death, sometimes tragic or mysterious, had overtaken six of his seven sons, while the youngest bore upon his brows the "dusk of the shadow." True, none knew for certain that three out of the six were dead, but few for a moment believed in the possibility that Alison and Marcus and Gloom were alive. On the night when Anne had left the island with Mànus MacCodrum, he, Sheumais, had heard nothing to alarm him. Even when, an hour after she had gone down to the haven, neither she nor his brothers had returned, and the *Luath* had put out to sea, he was not in fear of any ill. Clearly, Marcus and Gloom had gone away in the smack, perhaps determined to see that the girl was duly married by priest or minister. He would have perturbed himself little for days to come, but for a strange thing that happened that night. He

had returned to the house because of a chill that was upon him, and convinced too that all had sailed in the *Luath*. He was sitting brooding by the peat-fire, when he was startled by a sound at the window at the back of the room. A few bars of a familiar air struck painfully upon his ear, though played so low that they were just audible. What could it be but the "Dàn-nan-Ròn," and who would be playing that but Gloom? What did it mean? Perhaps after all, it was fantasy only, and there was no *feadan* out there in the dark. He was pondering this when, still low but louder and sharper than before, there rose and fell the strain which he hated, and Gloom never played before him, that of the *Dàvsa-na-mairv*, the "Dance of the Dead." Swiftly and silently he rose and crossed the room. In the dark shadows cast by the byre he could see nothing, but the music ceased. He went out, and searched everywhere, but found no one. So he returned, took down the Holy Book, with awed heart, and read slowly till peace came upon him, soft and sweet as the warmth of the peat-glow.

But as for Anne, she had never even this hint that one of the supposed dead might be alive, or

that, being dead, Gloom might yet touch a shadowy *feadan* into a wild remote air of the grave.

When month after month went by, and no hint of ill came to break upon their peace, Mànus grew light-hearted again. Once more his songs were heard as he came back from the fishing, or loitered ashore mending his nets. A new happiness was nigh to them, for Anne was with child. True, there was fear also, for the girl was not well at the time when her labour was near, and grew weaker daily. There came a day when Mànus had to go to Loch Boisdale in South Uist: and it was with pain and something of foreboding that he sailed away from Berneray in the Sound of Harris, where he lived. It was on the third night that he returned. He was met by Katreen MacRanald, the wife of his mate, with the news that on the morrow after his going Anne had sent for the priest who was staying at Loch Maddy, for she had felt the coming of death. It was that very evening she died, and took the child with her.

Mànus heard as one in a dream. It seemed to him that the tide was ebbing in his heart, and a cold, sleety rain falling, falling through a mist in his brain.

Sorrow lay heavily upon him. After the earthing of her whom he loved, he went to and fro solitary: often crossing the Narrows and going to the old Pictish Tower under the shadow of Ben Breac. He would not go upon the sea, but let his kinsman Callum do as he liked with the *Luath*.

Now and again Father Allan MacNeil sailed northward to see him. Each time he departed sadder. "The man is going mad, I fear," he said to Callum, the last time he saw Mànus.

The long summer nights brought peace and beauty to the isles. It was a great herring-year, and the moon-fishing was unusually good. All the Uist men who lived by the sea-harvest were in their boats whenever they could. The pollack, the dogfish, the otters, and the seals, with flocks of sea-fowl beyond number, shared in the common joy. Mànus MacCodrum alone paid no heed to herring or mackerel. He was often seen striding along the shore, and more than once had been heard laughing; sometimes, too, he was come upon at low tide by the great Reef of Berneray, singing wild strange runes and songs, or crouching upon a rock and brooding dark.

The midsummer moon found no man on Berneray except MacCodrum, the Reverend Mr. Black, the minister of the Free Kirk, and an old man named Anndra McIan. On the night before the last day of the middle month, Anndra was reproved by the minister for saying that he had seen a man rise out of one of the graves in the kirk-yard, and steal down by the stone-dykes towards Balnahunnur-sa-mona,[1] where Mànus MacCodrum lived.

"The dead do not rise and walk, Anndra."

"That may be, maighstir, but it may have been the Watcher of the Dead. Sure it is not three weeks since Padruic McAlistair was laid beneath the green mound. He 'll be wearying for another to take his place."

"Hoots, man, that is an old superstition. The dead do not rise and walk, I tell you."

"It is right you may be, maighstir, but I heard of this from my father, that was old before you were young, and from his father before him. When the last-buried is weary with being the Watcher of the Dead he goes about from place to place till he sees man, woman, or child

[1] *Baille-'na-aonar'sa mhonadh*, "the solitary farm on the hill-slope."

with the death-shadow in the eyes, and then he goes back to his grave and lies down in peace, for his vigil it will be over now."

The minister laughed at the folly, and went into his house to make ready for the Sacrament that was to be on the morrow. Old Anndra, however, was uneasy. After the porridge, he went down through the gloaming to Balnahunnur-sa-mona. He meant to go in and warn Mànus MacCodrum. But when he got to the west wall, and stood near the open window, he heard Mànus speaking in a loud voice, though he was alone in the room.

"*B' iongannach do ghràdh dhomhsa, a' toirt barrachd air gràdh nam ban!*" . . .[1]

This, Mànus cried in a voice quivering with pain. Anndra stopped still, fearful to intrude, fearful also, perhaps, to see some one there beside MacCodrum whom eyes should not see. Then the voice rose into a cry of agony.

"*Aoram dhuit, ay an dèigh dhomh fàs aosda!*"[2]

[1] "Thy love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women."

[2] "I shall worship thee, ay, even after I have become old."

With that, Anndra feared to stay. As he passed the byre he started, for he thought he saw the shadow of a man. When he looked closer he could see nought, so went his way, trembling and sore troubled.

It was dusk when Mànus came out. He saw that it was to be a cloudy night; and perhaps it was this that, after a brief while, made him turn in his aimless walk and go back to the house. He was sitting before the flaming heart of the peats, brooding in his pain, when suddenly he sprang to his feet.

Loud and clear, and close as though played under the very window of the room, came the cold, white notes of an oaten flute. Ah, too well he knew that wild, fantastic air. Who could it be but Gloom Achanna, playing upon his *feadan;* and what air of all airs could that be but the "Dàn-nan-Ròn?"

Was it the dead man, standing there unseen in the shadow of the Grave? Was Marcus beside him, Marcus with the knife still thrust up to the hilt, and the lung-foam upon his lips? Can the sea give up its dead? Can there be strain of any *feadan* that ever was made of man, there in the Silence?

In vain Mànus MacCodrum tortured himself thus. Too well he knew that he had heard the "Dàn-nan-Ròn," and that no other than Gloom Achanna was the player.

Suddenly an access of fury wrought him to madness. With an abrupt lilt the tune swung into the *Davsà-na-mairv*, and thence, after a few seconds, and in a moment, into that mysterious and horrible *Codhail-nan-Pairtean* which none but Gloom played.

There could be no mistake now, nor as to what was meant by the muttering, jerking air of the "gathering of the crabs."

With a savage cry Mànus snatched up a long dirk from its place by the chimney, and rushed out.

There was not the shadow of a sea-gull even in front; so he sped round by the byre. Neither was anything unusual discoverable there.

"Sorrow upon me," he cried; "man or wraith, I will be putting it to the dirk!"

But there was no one; nothing; not a sound.

Then, at last, with a listless droop of his arms, MacCodrum turned and went into the house again. He remembered what Gloom Achanna had said: "*You' ll hear the 'Dàn-nan-*

Ròn' the night before you die, Mànus Mac Codrum, and lest you doubt it, you 'll hear it in your death-hour."

He did not stir from the fire for three hours; then he rose, and went over to his bed and lay down without undressing.

He did not sleep, but lay listening and watching. The peats burned low, and at last there was scarce a flicker along the floor. Outside he could hear the wind moaning upon the sea. By a strange rustling sound he knew that the tide was ebbing across the great reef that runs out from Berneray. By midnight the clouds had gone. The moon shone clear and full. When he heard the clock strike in its worm-eaten, rickety case, he sat up, and listened intently. He could hear nothing. No shadow stirred. Surely if the wraith of Gloom Achanna were waiting for him it would make some sign, now, in the dead of night.

An hour passed. Mànus rose, crossed the room on tip-toe, and soundlessly opened the door. The salt wind blew fresh against his face. The smell of the shore, of wet sea-wrack and pungent gale, of foam and moving water, came sweet to his nostrils. He heard a skua

calling from the rocky promontory. From the slopes behind, the wail of a moon-restless lapwing rose and fell mournfully.

Crouching and with slow, stealthy step, he stole round by the seaward wall. At the dyke he stopped, and scrutinised it on each side. He could see for several hundred yards, and there was not even a sheltering sheep. Then, soundlessly as ever, he crept close to the byre. He put his ear to chink after chink: but not a stir of a shadow even. As a shadow, himself, he drifted lightly to the front, past the hay-rick; then, with swift glances to right and left, opened the door and entered. As he did so, he stood as though frozen. Surely, he thought, that was a sound as of a step, out there by the hay-rick? A terror was at his heart. In front, the darkness of the byre, with God knows what dread thing awaiting him; behind, a mysterious walker in the night, swift to take him unawares. The trembling that came upon him was nigh overmastering. At last, with a great effort, he moved towards the ledge, where he kept a candle. With shaking hand he struck a light. The empty byre looked ghostly and fearsome in the flickering gloom. But there was no one,

nothing. He was about to turn, when a rat ran along a loose hanging beam, and stared at him, or at the yellow shine. He saw its black eyes shining like peat-water in moonlight.

The creature was curious at first, then indifferent. At least, it began to squeak, and then make a swift scratching with its forepaws. Once or twice came an answering squeak; a faint rustling was audible here and there among the straw.

With a sudden spring Mànus seized the beast. Even in the second in which he raised it to his mouth and scrunched its back with his strong teeth, it bit him severely. He let his hands drop, and grope furtively in the darkness. With stooping head he shook the last breath out of the rat, holding it with his front teeth, with back-curled lips. The next moment he dropped the dead thing, trampled upon it, and burst out laughing. There was a scurrying of pattering feet, a rustling of straw. Then silence again. A draught from the door had caught the flame and extinguished it. In the silence and darkness MacCodrum stood, intent, but no longer afraid. He laughed again, because it was so easy to kill with the teeth. The noise of his laughter

seemed to him to leap hither and thither like a shadowy ape. He could see it: a blackness within the darkness. Once more he laughed. It amused him to see the *thing* leaping about like that.

Suddenly he turned, and walked out into the moonlight. The lapwing was still circling and wailing. He mocked it, with loud shrill *pēē-wēēty*, *pēē-wēēty*, *pēē-wēēt*. The bird swung waywardly, alarmed: its abrupt cry, and dancing flight aroused its fellows. The air was full of the lamentable crying of plovers.

A sough of the sea came inland. Mànus inhaled its breath with a sigh of delight. A passion for the running wave was upon him. He yearned to feel green water break against his breast. Thirst and hunger, too, he felt at last, though he had known neither all day. How cool and sweet, he thought, would be a silver haddock, or even a brown-backed liath, alive and gleaming, wet with the sea-water still bubbling in its gills. It would writhe, just like the rat; but then how he would throw his head back, and toss the glittering thing up into the moonlight, catch it on the downwhirl just as it neared the wave on whose crest he was, and then devour it with swift voracious gulps!

With quick, jerky steps he made his way past the landward side of the small, thatch-roofed cottage. He was about to enter, when he noticed that the door, which he had left ajar, was closed. He stole to the window and glanced in.

A single, thin, wavering moonbeam flickered in the room. But the flame at the heart of the peats had worked its way through the ash, and there was now a dull glow, though that was within the "smooring," and threw scarce more than a glimmer into the room.

There was enough light, however, for Mànus MacCodrum to see that a man sat on the three-legged stool before the fire. His head was bent, as though he were listening. The face was away from the window. It was his own wraith, of course; of that, Mànus felt convinced. What was it doing there? Perhaps it had eaten the Holy Book, so that it was beyond his putting a *rosad* on it! At the thought he laughed loud. The shadow-man leaped to his feet.

The next moment MacCodrum swung himself on to the thatched roof, and clambered from rope to rope, where these held down the big stones which acted as dead-weight for the thatch, against the fury of tempests. Stone

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a huge stone he hurled it through the window. Then, laughing and screaming, he fled towards the Great Reef, along whose sides the ebb-tide gurgled and sobbed, with glistering white foam.

He ceased screaming or laughing as he heard the "Dàn-nan-Ròn" behind him, faint, but following; sure, following. Bending low, he raced towards the rock-ledges from which ran the reef.

When at last he reached the extreme ledge he stopped abruptly. Out on the reef he saw from ten to twenty seals, some swimming to and fro, others clinging to the reef, one or two making a curious barking sound, with round heads lifted against the moon. In one place there was a surge and lashing of water. Two bulls were fighting to the death.

With swift, stealthy movements Mànus unclothed himself. The damp had clotted the leathern thongs of his boots, and he snarled with curled lip as he tore at them. He shone white in the moonshine, but was sheltered from the sea by the ledge behind which he crouched. "What did Gloom Achanna mean by that?" he muttered savagely, as he heard the nearing air change into the "Dance of the Dead." For a

moment Mànus was a man again. He was nigh upon turning to face his foe, corpse or wraith or living body; to spring at this thing which followed him, and tear it with hands and teeth. Then, once more, the hated "Song of the Seals" stole mockingly through the night.

With a shiver he slipped into the dark water. Then with quick, powerful strokes he was in the moon-flood, and swimming hard against it out by the leeside of the reef.

So intent were the seals upon the fight of the two great bulls that they did not see the swimmer, or, if they did, took him for one of their own people. A savage snarling and barking and half-human crying came from them. Mànus was almost within reach of the nearest, when one of the combatants sank dead, with torn throat. The victor clambered on the reef, and leaned high, swaying its great head and shoulders to and fro. In the moonlight its white fangs were like red coral. Its blinded eyes ran with gore.

There was a rush, a rapid leaping and swirling, as Mànus surged in among the seals, which were swimming round the place where the slain bull had sunk.

The laughter of this long, white seal terrified them.

When his knee struck against a rock, MacCodrum groped with his arms, and hauled himself out of the water.

From rock to rock and ledge to ledge he went, with a fantastic, dancing motion, his body gleaming foam-white in the moonshine.

As he pranced and trampled along the weedy ledges, he sang snatches of an old rune, — the lost rune of the MacCodrums of Uist. The seals on the rocks crouched spell-bound; those slow-swimming in the water stared with brown unwinking eyes, with their small ears strained against the sound: —

It is I, Mànus MacCodrum,
I am telling you that, you, Anndra of my blood,
And you, Neil my grandfather, and you, and you, and you!
Ay, ay, Mànus my name is, Mànus Mac Mànus!
It is I myself, and no other,
Your brother, O Seals of the Sea!
Give me blood of the red fish,
And a bite of the flying *sgadan:*
The green wave on my belly,
And the foam in my eyes!
I am your bull-brother, O Bulls of the Sea,
Bull — better than any of you, snarling bulls!

Come to me, mate, seal of the soft, furry womb,
White am I still, though red shall I be,
Red with the streaming red blood if any dispute me!
Aoh, aoh, aoh, arò, arò, ho-rò!
A man was I, a seal am I,
My fangs churn the yellow foam from my lips;
Give way to me, give way to me, Seals of the Sea;
Give way, for I am fëy of the sea
And the sea-maiden I see there,
And my name, true, is Mànus MacCodrum,
The bull-seal that was a man, Arà! Arà!

By this time he was close upon the great black seal, which was still monotonously swaying its gory head, with its sightless eyes rolling this way and that. The sea-folk seemed fascinated. None moved, even when the dancer in the moonshine trampled upon them.

When he came within arm-reach he stopped.

"Are you the Ceann-Cinnidh?" he cried. "Are you the head of this clan of the sea-folk?"

The huge beast ceased its swaying. Its curled lips moved from its fangs.

"Speak, Seal, if there's no curse upon you! Maybe, now, you'll be Anndra himself, the brother of my father! Speak! *H'st—are you hearing that music on the shore?* 'T is the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn'! Death o' my soul, it's the

'Dàn-nan-Ròn'! Aha, 'tis Gloom Achanna out of the Grave. Back, beast, and let me move on!"

With that, seeing the great bull did not move, he struck it full in the face with clenched fist. There was a hoarse, strangling roar, and the seal champion was upon him with lacerating fangs.

Mànus swayed this way and that. All he could hear now was the snarling and growling and choking cries of the maddened seals. As he fell, they closed in upon him. His screams wheeled through the night like mad birds. With desperate fury he struggled to free himself. The great bull pinned him to the rock; a dozen others tore at his white flesh, till his spouting blood made the rocks scarlet in the white shine of the moon.

For a few seconds he still fought savagely, tearing with teeth and hands. Once, a red irrecognisable mass, he staggered to his knees. A wild cry burst from his lips, when from the shore-end of the reef came loud and clear the lilt of the rune of his fate.

The next moment he was dragged down and swept from the reef into the sea. As the torn and mangled body disappeared from sight, it

was amid a seething crowd of leaping and struggling seals, their eyes wild with affright and fury, their fangs red with human gore.

And Gloom Achanna, turning upon the reef, moved swiftly inland, playing low on his *feadan*, as he went.

Green Branches.

In the year that followed the death of Mànus MacCodrum, James Achanna saw nothing of his brother Gloom. He might have thought himself alone in the world, of all his people, but for a letter that came to him out of the west. True, he had never accepted the common opinion that his brothers had both been drowned on that night when Anne Gillespie left Eilanmore with Mànus. In the first place, he had nothing of that inner conviction concerning the fate of Gloom which he had concerning that of Marcus; in the next, had he not heard the sound of the *feadan*, which no one that he knew played, except Gloom; and, for further token, was not the tune that which he hated above all others, — the "Dance of the Dead," — for who but Gloom would be playing that, he hating it so, and the

hour being late, and no one else on Eilanmore? It was no sure thing that the dead had not come back; but the more he thought of it the more Achanna believed that his sixth brother was still alive. Of this, however, he said nothing to any one.

It was as a man set free that, at last, after long waiting and patient trouble with the disposal of all that was left of the Achanna heritage, he left the island. It was a grey memory for him. The bleak moorland of it, the blight that had lain so long and so often upon the crops, the rains that had swept the isle for grey days and grey weeks and grey months, the sobbing of the sea by day and its dark moan by night, its dim relinquishing sigh in the calm of dreary ebbs, its hollow, baffling roar when the storm-shadow swept up out of the sea, — one and all oppressed him, even in memory. He had never loved the island, even when it lay green and fragrant in the green and white seas under white and blue skies, fresh and sweet as an Eden of the sea. He had ever been lonely and weary, tired of the mysterious shadow that lay upon his folk, caring little for any of his brothers except the eldest, — long since mysteriously gone

out of the ken of man, — and almost hating Gloom, who had ever borne him a grudge because of his beauty, and because of his likeness to and reverent heed for Alison. Moreover, ever since he had come to love Katreen Macarthur, the daughter of Donald Macarthur who lived in Sleat of Skye, he had been eager to live near her; the more eager as he knew that Gloom loved the girl also, and wished for success not only for his own sake, but so as to put a slight upon his younger brother.

So, when at last he left the island, he sailed southward gladly. He was leaving Eilanmore; he was bound to a new home in Skye, and perhaps he was going to his long-delayed, long-dreamed-of happiness. True, Katreen was not pledged to him; he did not even know for sure if she loved him. He thought, hoped, dreamed, almost believed that she did; but then there was her cousin Ian, who had long wooed her, and to whom old Donald Macarthur had given his blessing. Nevertheless, his heart would have been lighter than it had been for long, but for two things. First, there was the letter. Some weeks earlier he had received it, not recognising the writing, because of the few

letters he had ever seen, and, moreover, as it was in a feigned hand. With difficulty he had deciphered the manuscript, plain printed though it was. It ran thus:—

"Well, Sheumais, my brother, it is wondering if I am dead, you will be. Maybe ay, and maybe no. But I send you this writing to let you see that I know all you do and think of. So you are going to leave Eilanmore without an Achanna upon it? And you will be going to Sleat in Skye? Well, let me be telling you this thing. *Do not go.* I see blood there. And there is this, too: neither you nor any man shall take Katreen away from me. *You* know that; and Ian Macarthur knows it; and Katreen knows it; and that holds whether I am alive or dead. I say to you: do not go. It will be better for you, and for all. Ian Macarthur is away in the north-sea with the whaler-captain who came to us at Eilanmore, and will not be back for three months yet. It will be better for him not to come back. But if he comes back he will have to reckon with the man who says that Katreen Macarthur is his. I would rather not have two men to speak to, and one my brother. It does not matter to you where I am. I want no money just now. But put aside my portion for me. Have it ready for me against the day I call for it. I will not be patient that day; so have it ready for me. In the place that I am I am content. You will be saying: why is my brother away in a remote place (I will say this to you: that it is not further north than St. Kilda nor further south than the Mull of Cantyre!), and for what reason? That is between me and

silence. But perhaps you think of Anne sometimes. Do you know that she lies under the green grass? And of Mànus MacCodrum? They say that he swam out into the sea and was drowned; and they whisper of the seal-blood, though the minister is wrath with them for that. He calls it a madness. Well, I was there at that madness, and I played to it on my *feadan*. And now, Sheumais, can you be thinking of what the tune was that I played?

"Your brother, who waits his own day,

"GLOOM.

"Do not be forgetting this thing: *I would rather not be playing the 'Damhsà-na-mairbh.'* It was an ill hour for Mànus when he heard the 'Dàn-nan-Ròn;' it was the song of his soul, that; and yours is the 'Davsa-na-Mairv.'"

This letter was ever in his mind: this, and what happened in the gloaming when he sailed away for Skye in the herring-smack of two men who lived at Armadale in Sleat. For, as the boat moved slowly out of the haven, one of the men asked him if he was sure that no one was left upon the island; for he thought he had seen a figure on the rocks, waving a black scarf. Achanna shook his head; but just then his companion cried that at that moment he had seen the same thing. So the smack was put about, and when she was moving slow through the haven again, Achanna sculled

ashore in the little coggly punt. In vain he searched here and there, calling loudly again and again. Both men could hardly have been mistaken, he thought. If there were no human creature on the island, and if their eyes had not played them false, who could it be? The wraith of Marcus, mayhap; or might it be the old man himself (his father), risen to bid farewell to his youngest son, or to warn him?

It was no use to wait longer, so, looking often behind him, he made his way to the boat again, and rowed slowly out towards the smack.

Jerk—jerk—jerk across the water came, low but only too loud for him, the opening motif of the "Damhsa-na-Mairbh." A horror came upon him, and he drove the boat through the water so that the sea splashed over the bows. When he came on deck, he cried in a hoarse voice to the man next him to put up the helm, and let the smack swing to the wind.

"There is no one there, Callum Campbell," he whispered.

"And who is it that will be making that strange music?"

"What music?"

"Sure it has stopped now, but I heard it clear.

and so did Anndra MacEwan. It was like the sound of a reed-pipe, and the tune was an eerie one at that."

"It was the Dance of the Dead."

"And who will be playing that?" asked the man, with fear in his eyes.

"No living man."

"No living man?"

"No. I 'm thinking it will be one of my brothers who was drowned here, and by the same token that it is Gloom, for he played upon the *feadan*. But if not, then — then —"

The two men waited in breathless silence, each trembling with superstitious fear; but at last the elder made a sign to Achanna to finish.

"Then — it will be the Kelpie."

"Is there — is there one of the — the cave-women here?"

"It is said; and you know of old that the Kelpie sings or plays a strange tune to wile seamen to their death."

At that moment, the fantastic, jerking music came loud and clear across the bay. There was a horrible suggestion in it, as if dead bodies were moving along the ground with long jerks, and crying and laughing wild. It was

enough; the men, Campbell and MacEwan, would not now have waited longer if Achanna had offered them all he had in the world. Nor were they, or he, out of their panic haste till the smack stood well out at sea, and not a sound could be heard from Eilanmore.

They stood watching, silent. Out of the dusky mass that lay in the seaward way to the north came a red gleam. It was like an eye staring after them with blood-red glances.

"What is that, Achanna?" asked one of the men at last.

"It looks as though a fire had been lit in the house up in the island. The door and the window must be open. The fire must be fed with wood, for no peats would give that flame; and there were none lit when I left. To my knowing, there was no wood for burning except the wood of the shelves and the bed."

"And who would be doing that?"

"I know of that no more than you do, Callum Campbell."

No more was said, and it was a relief to all when the last glimmer of the light was absorbed in the darkness.

At the end of the voyage Campbell and

MacEwan were well pleased to be quit of their companion; not so much because he was moody and distraught, as because they feared that a spell was upon him,—a fate in the working of which they might become involved. It needed no vow of the one to the other for them to come to the conclusion that they would never land on Eilanmore, or, if need be, only in broad day light and never alone.

The days went well for James Achanna, where he made his home at Ranza-beag, on Ranza Water in the Sleat of Skye. The farm was small but good, and he hoped that with help and care he would soon have the place as good a farm as there was in all Skye.

Donald Macarthur did not let him see much of Katreen, but the old man was no longer opposed to him. Sheumais must wait, till Ian Macarthur came back again, which might be any day now. For sure, James Achanna of Ranza-beag was a very different person from the youngest of the Achanna-folk who held by on lonely Eilanmore; moreover, the old man could not but think with pleasure that it would be well to see Katreen able to walk

over the whole land of Ranza, from the cairn at the north of his own Ranza-Mòr to the burn at the south of Ranza-beag, and know it for her own.

But Achanna was ready to wait. Even before he had the secret word of Katreen he knew from her beautiful dark eyes that she loved him. As the weeks went by they managed to meet often, and at last Katreen told him that she loved him too, and would have none but him; but that they must wait till Ian came back, because of the pledge given to him by her father. They were days of joy for him. Through many a hot noontide hour, through many a gloaming, he went as one in a dream. Whenever he saw a birch swaying in the wind, or a wave leaping upon Loch Liath, that was near his home, or passed a bush covered with wild roses, or saw the moonbeams lying white on the boles of the pines, he thought of Katreen, — his fawn for grace, and so lithe and tall, with sunbrown face and wavy, dark mass of hair, and shadowy eyes and rowan-red lips. It is said that there is a god clothed in shadow who goes to and fro among the human kind, putting silence between lovers with his waving hands,

and breathing a chill out of his cold breath, and leaving a gulf of deep water flowing between them because of the passing of his feet. That shadow never came their way. Their love grew as a flower fed by rains and warmed by sunlight.

When midsummer came, and there was no sign of Ian Macarthur, it was already too late. Katreen had been won.

During the summer months, it was the custom for Katreen and two of the farm-girls to go up Maol-Ranza, to reside at the shealing of Cnoc-an-Fhraoch: and this because of the hill-pasture for the sheep. Cnoc-an-Fhraoch is a round, boulder-studded hill covered with heather, which has a precipitous corrie on each side, and in front slopes down to Lochan Fraoch, a lochlet surrounded by dark woods. Behind the hill, or great hillock rather, lay the shealing. At each week-end Katreen went down to Ranza-Mòr, and on every Monday morning at sunrise returned to her heather-girt eyrie. It was on one of these visits that she endured a cruel shock. Her father told her that she must marry some one else than Sheumais Achanna. He had heard words about him which made a

union impossible, and, indeed, he hoped that the man would leave Ranza-beag. In the end, he admitted that what he had heard was to the effect that Achanna was under a doom of some kind; that he was involved in a blood feud; and, moreover, that he was fëy. The old man would not be explicit as to the person from whom his information came, but hinted that he was a stranger of rank, probably a laird of the isles. Besides this, there was word of Ian Macarthur. He was at Thurso, in the far north, and would be in Skye before long, and he — her father — had written to him that he might wed Katreen as soon as was practicable.

"Do you see that lintie yonder, father?" was her response to this.

"Ay, lass, and what about the birdeen?"

"Well, when she mates with a hawk, so will I be mating with Ian Macarthur, but not till then."

With that she turned, and left the house, and went back to Cnoc-an-Fhraoch. On the way she met Achanna.

It was that night that for the first time he swam across Lochan Fraoch to meet Katreen.

The quickest way to reach the shealing was

to row across the lochlet, and then ascend by a sheep-path that wound through the hazel copses at the base of the hill. Fully half an hour was thus saved, because of the steepness of the precipitous corries to right and left. A boat was kept for this purpose, but it was fastened to a shore-boulder by a padlocked iron chain, the key of which was kept by Donald Macarthur. Latterly he had refused to let this key out of his possession. For one thing, no doubt, he believed he could thus restrain Achanna from visiting his daughter. The young man could not approach the shealing from either side without being seen.

But that night, soon after the moon was whitening slow in the dark, Katreen stole down to the hazel copse and awaited the coming of her lover. The lochan was visible from almost any point on Cnoc-an-Fhraoch, as well as from the south side. To cross it in a boat unseen, if any watcher were near, would be impossible, nor could even a swimmer hope to escape notice unless in the gloom of night or, mayhap, in the dusk. When, however, she saw, half way across the water, a spray of green branches slowly moving athwart the surface, she knew

that Sheumais was keeping his tryst. If, perchance, any one else saw, he or she would never guess that those derelict rowan-branches shrouded Sheumais Achanna.

It was not till the estray had drifted close to the ledge, where, hid among the bracken and the hazel undergrowth, she awaited him, that Katreen descried the face of her lover, as with one hand he parted the green sprays, and stared longingly and lovingly at the figure he could just discern in the dim, fragrant obscurity.

And as it was this night so was it many of the nights that followed. Katreen spent the days as in a dream. Not even the news of her cousin Ian's return disturbed her much.

One day the inevitable meeting came. She was at Ranza-Mòr, and when a shadow came into the dairy where she was standing she looked up, and saw Ian before her. She thought he appeared taller and stronger than ever, though still not so tall as Sheumais, who would appear slim beside the Herculean Skye man. But as she looked at his close curling black hair and thick bull-neck and the sullen, eyes in his dark wind-red face, she wondered that she had ever tolerated him at all.

He broke the ice at once.

"Tell me, Katreen, are you glad to see me back again?"

"I am glad that you are home once more safe and sound."

"And will you make it my home for me by coming to live with me, as I 've asked you again and again?"

"No: as I 've told you again and again."

He gloomed at her angrily for a few moments before he resumed.

"I will be asking you this one thing, Katreen, daughter of my father's brother; do you love that man Achanna who lives at Ranza-beag?"

"You may ask the wind why it is from the east or the west, but it won't tell you. You 're not the wind's master."

"If you think I will let this man take you away from me, you are thinking a foolish thing."

"And you saying a foolisher."

"Ay?"

"Ay, sure. What could you do, Ian Mhic Ian? At the worst, you could do no more than kill James Achanna. What then? I too would die. You cannot separate us. I would not

marry you, now, though you were the last man on the world and I the last woman."

"You 're a fool, Katreen Macarthur. Your father has promised you to me, and I tell you this: if you love Achanna you 'll save his life only by letting him go away from here. I promise you he will not be here long."

"Ay, you promise *me;* but you will not say that thing to James Achanna's face. You are a coward."

With a muttered oath the man turned on his heel.

"Let him beware o' me, and you, too, Katreen-mo-nighean-donn. I swear it by my mother's grave and by St. Martin's Cross that you will be mine by hook or by crook."

The girl smiled scornfully. Slowly she lifted a milk-pail.

"It would be a pity to waste the good milk, Ian-gòrach, but if you don 't go it is I that will be emptying the pail on you, and then you 'll be as white without as your heart is within."

"So you call me witless, do you? *Ian-gorach!* Well, we shall be seeing as to that. And as for the milk, there will be more than milk spilt because of *you*, Katreen-donn."

From that day, though neither Sheumais nor Katreen knew of it, a watch was set upon Achanna.

It could not be long before their secret was discovered, and it was with a savage joy overmastering his sullen rage that Ian Macarthur knew himself the discoverer, and conceived his double vengeance. He dreamed, gloatingly, on both the black thoughts that roamed like ravenous beasts through the solitudes of his heart. But he did not dream that another man was filled with hate because of Katreen's lover, another man who had sworn to make her his own, the man who, disguised, was known in Armadale as Donald McLean, and in the north isles would have been hailed as Gloom Achanna.

There had been steady rain for three days, with a cold, raw wind. On the fourth the sun shone, and set in peace. An evening of quiet beauty followed, warm, fragrant, dusky from the absence of moon or star, though the thin veils of mist promised to disperse as the night grew.

There were two men that eve in the undergrowth on the south side of the lochlet. Sheumais had come earlier than his wont. Impatient

for the dusk, he could scarce await the waning of the afterglow; surely, he thought, he might venture. Suddenly, his ears caught the sound of cautious footsteps. Could it be old Donald, perhaps with some inkling of the way in which his daughter saw her lover in despite of all; or, may-hap, might it be Ian Macarthur, tracking him as a hunter stalking a stag by the water-pools? He crouched, and waited. In a few minutes he saw Ian carefully picking his way. The man stooped as he descried the green branches; smiled as, with a low rustling, he raised them from the ground.

Meanwhile yet another man watched and waited, though on the farther side of the lochan, where the hazel copses were. Gloom Achanna half hoped, half feared the approach of Katreen. It would be sweet to see her again, sweet to slay her lover before her eyes, brother to him though he was. But, there was the chance that she might descry him, and, whether recognisingly or not, warn the swimmer.

So it was that he had come there before sundown, and now lay crouched among the bracken underneath a projecting mossy ledge close upon

the water, where it could scarce be that she or any should see him.

As the gloaming deepened, a great stillness reigned. There was no breath of wind. A scarce audible sigh prevailed among the spires of the heather. The churring of a night-jar throbbed through the darkness. Somewhere a corncrake called its monotonous *crék-craik:* the dull harsh sound emphasising the utter stillness. The pinging of the gnats hovering over and among the sedges made an incessant rumour through the warm, sultry air.

There was a splash once as of a fish. Then, silence. Then a lower but more continuous splash, or rather wash of water. A slow *susurrus* rustled through the dark.

Where he lay among the fern Gloom Achanna slowly raised his head, stared through the shadows, and listened intently. If Katreen were waiting there she was not near.

Noiselessly he slid into the water. When he rose it was under a clump of green branches. These he had cut and secured three hours before. With his left hand he swam slowly, or kept his equipoise in the water; with his right he guided the heavy rowan-bough. In his

mouth were two objects, one long and thin and dark, the other with an occasional glitter as of a dead fish.

His motion was scarce perceptible. None the less he was nigh the middle of the loch almost as soon as another clump of green branches. Doubtless the swimmer beneath it was confident that he was now safe from observation.

The two clumps of green branches drew nearer. The smaller seemed a mere estray, a spray blown down by the recent gale. But all at once the larger clump jerked awkwardly and stopped. Simultaneously a strange, low strain of music came from the other.

The strain ceased. The two clumps of green branches remained motionless. Slowly, at last, the larger moved forward. It was too dark for the swimmer to see if any one lay hid behind the smaller. When he reached it he thrust aside the leaves.

It was as though a great salmon leaped. There was a splash, and a narrow, dark body shot through the gloom. At the end of it something gleamed. Then suddenly there was a savage struggle. The inanimate green branches

tore this way and that, and surged and swirled. Gasping cries came from the leaves. Again and again the gleaming thing leapt. At the third leap an awful scream shrilled through the silence. The echo of it wailed thrice, with horrible distinctness, in the corrie beyond Cnoc-an-Fhraoch. Then, after a faint splashing, there was silence once more. One clump of green branches drifted slowly up the lochlet. The other moved steadily towards the place whence, a brief while before, it had stirred.

Only one thing lived in the heart of Gloom Achanna, — the joy of his exultation. He had killed his brother Sheumais. He had always hated him because of his beauty; of late he had hated him because he had stood between him, Gloom, and Katreen Macarthur, — because he had become her lover. They were all dead now, except himself, all the Achannas. He was "Achanna." When the day came that he would go back to Galloway, there would be a magpie on the first birk, and a screaming jay on the first rowan, and a croaking raven on the first fir; ay, he would be their suffering, though they knew nothing of him meanwhile! He would be Achanna of Achanna again. Let those who

would stand in his way beware. As for Katreen: perhaps he would take her there, perhaps not. He smiled.

These thoughts were the wandering fires in his brain while he slowly swam shoreward under the floating green branches, and as he disengaged himself from them, and crawled upward through the bracken. It was at this moment that a third man entered the water, from the farther shore.

Prepared as he was to come suddenly upon Katreen, Gloom was startled when, in a place of dense shadow, a hand touched his shoulder, and her voice whispered "*Sheumais, Sheumais!*"

The next moment she was in his arms. He could feel her heart beating against his side.

"What was it, Sheumais? What was that awful cry?" she whispered.

For answer, he put his lips to hers, and kissed her again and again.

The girl drew back. Some vague instinct warned her.

"What is it, Sheumais? Why don't you speak?"

He drew her close again.

"Pulse of my heart, it is I who love you, I

who love you best of all; it is I, Gloom Achanna!"

With a cry, she struck him full in the face. He staggered, and in that moment she freed herself.

"You *coward!*"

"Katreen, I—"

"Come no nearer. If you do, it will be the death of you!"

"The death o' me! Ah, bonnie fool that you are, and is it you that will be the death o' me?"

"Ay, Gloom Achanna, for I have but to scream and Sheumais will be here, an he would kill you like a dog if he knew you did me harm."

"Ah, but if there were no Sheumais, or any man to come between me an' my will!"

"Then there would be a woman! Ay, if you overbore me I would strangle you with my hair, or fix my teeth in your false throat!"

"I was not for knowing you were such a wild-cat: but I'll tame you yet, my lass! Aha, wild-cat!" and as he spoke he laughed low.

"It is a true word, Gloom of the black heart. I *am* a wild-cat, and like a wild-cat I am not to

be seized by a fox; and that you will be finding to your cost, by the holy St. Bridget! But now, off with you, brother of my man!"

"Your man — ha! ha!—"

"Why do you laugh?"

"Sure, I am laughing at a warm, white lass like yourself having a dead man as your lover!"

"A — dead — man?"

No answer came. The girl shook with a new fear. Slowly she drew closer, till her breath fell warm against the face of the other. He spoke at last.

"Ay, a dead man."

"It is a lie."

"Where would you be that you were not hearing his good-bye? I'm thinking it was loud enough!"

"It is a lie — it is a lie!"

"No, it is no lie. Sheumais is cold enough now. He's low among the weeds by now. Ay, by now: down there in the lochan."

"*What* — you, *you devil!* Is it for killing your own brother you would be?"

"I killed no one. He died his own way. Maybe the cramp took him. Maybe — maybe a kelpie gripped him. I watched. I saw

him beneath the green branches. He was dead before he died. I saw it in the white face o' him. Then he sank. He 's dead. Sheumais is dead. Look here, girl, I 've always loved you. I swore the oath upon you. You 're mine. Sure, you 're mine now, Katreen! It is loving you I am! It will be a south wind for you from this day, *muirnean mochree!* See here, I 'll show you how I —"

"Back — back — *murderer!*"

"Be stopping that foolishness now, Katreen Macarthur! By the Book I am tired of it. I am loving you, and it 's having you for mine I am! And if you won't come to me like the dove to its mate, I 'll come to you like the hawk to the dove!"

With a spring he was upon her. In vain she strove to beat him back. His arms held her as a stoat grips a rabbit.

He pulled her head back, and kissed her throat till the strangulating breath sobbed against his ear. With a last despairing effort she screamed the name of the dead man: "*Sheumais! Sheumais! Sheumais!*" The man who struggled with her laughed.

"Ay, call away! The herrin' will be coming

through the bracken as soon as Sheumais comes to your call! Ah, it is mine you are now, Katreen! He 's dead an' cold — an' you 'd best have a living man — an' — "

She fell back, her balance lost in the sudden releasing. What did it mean? Gloom still stood there, but as one frozen. Through the darkness she saw, at last, that a hand gripped his shoulder; behind him a black mass vaguely obtruded.

For some moments there was absolute silence. Then a hoarse voice came out of the dark.

" You will be knowing now who it is, Gloom Achanna! "

The voice was that of Sheumais, who lay dead in the lochan. The murderer shook as in a palsy. With a great effort, slowly he turned his head. He saw a white splatch, the face of the corpse; in this white splatch flamed two burning eyes, the eyes of the soul of the brother whom he had slain.

He reeled, staggered as a blind man, and, free now of that awful clasp, swayed to and fro as one drunken.

Slowly, Sheumais raised an arm and pointed downward through the wood towards the

lochan. Still pointing, he moved swiftly forward.

With a cry like a beast, Gloom Achanna swung to one side, stumbled, rose, and leaped into the darkness.

For some minutes Sheumais and Katreen stood, silent, apart, listening to the crashing sound of his flight, — the race of the murderer against the pursuing shadow of the Grave.

V

THE DAUGHTER OF THE SUN.
THE BIRDEEN.
SILK O' THE KINE.

The Daughter of the Sun.

THERE are not many of the Gaelic folk of Lochfyneside in Argyll who could tell the story of Ethlenn Stuart; perhaps few, even, who could point out the particular rocky promontory, to this day (although upon no map) called Ard-Ethlenn, some thirty miles or less up the wild and beautiful western coast of Lochfyne, between Crarae Point and the Ceann-More. *Ard-Ethlenn, Creagaleen:* meaningless names these to the few strangers who might chance to hear them from any fisherman of Strachur or Stralachlan. But to those who know who and what Ethlenn Stuart was, and the story of her love for Ian McIan, the mountain-poet who is known as Ian Mòr of the Hills, and the end of their tragic joy, and the last sleep of her against the sun,—for such as these "Ard-Ethlenn" and

"Creagaleen" "Creag-Gáusain" and "Maol-Láe-y-a-ghrian," are names with a haunting music.

My own knowledge of "the Daughter of the Sun," as Ethlenn was called by the imaginative people of the glens, — partly after a poem by Ian Mòr, addressed to her under that name, partly because of her passionate love of sunlight and the hill-wind and the sea, but mainly, I understand, because she herself was a poet, "a poet of the fire of love, and so a Daughter of the Sun," as one of the old Celtic folk-poems has it, — this knowledge was largely derived from Dionaid MacDiarmid, the married sister of Ian. Dionaid herself, with her little cottage, are no longer known of Strachur. Years ago the small croft by the pine-wood behind Easter Creggans was destroyed by a winter-gale, and in time even the few poor, fragmentary traces of human occupation disappeared. The summer before the accident, Dionaid had become weak and ailing; in the autumn she died.

But, also, I knew Ian Mòr. Often, as a child, I met him upon the lonely hills where I lived; later, he would speak with me when he

would have word of none, when the gloom was upon him; and I was with him when he died.

We have all our dreams of impossible love. Somewhere, sometimes, the impossible happens. Then a man and a woman know that oblivious rapture of love, the *mirdhei*, the ecstasy of the life of dream paramount over the ordinary human gladness of the life of actuality. If ever there were man and woman who were these flower-crowned visionaries of love, Ian Mòr McIan and Ethlenn Stuart were they.

I cannot tell any connected story of their two lives; nor, sure, is there any need to do so. The name and repute of Ian are with his kindred and the hill-folk of his race: he has his immortality by the flame-lit ingle, in the byres of the straths, in twilight haunts of lovers, in the mountain-shealings, wherever the songs of Ian Mòr, so passing sweet and strange, are warm upon the lips of young and old. In his last years he was known among the people in Strachurmore as Ian-Aonaran, or as Ian-mòr-nà-aonar-sa-mhonadh — Ian "the strange one, the lonely one," or Ian "the lonely one of the hills," as, long ago, Ossian called a solitary hill-Druid

aonaran liath nan creag, "the hoary hermit of the rocks." No one ever ventured to say that he was mad. All knew, however, that, years agone, he had become distraught through the passion of his love, which had nigh killed him. At most, if a stronger epithet than *aonaran* was used (which means both "lonely" and "singular"), his *dubhachas*, his gloom, was gently alluded to, or the *cianalas*, the mountain-melancholy, or that strange shadow thrown across the mind of man by nature, the *ciar nan carn*, the gloom of the rocks, as it is called by the hill-people. Young and old held in reverence this man who dwelt on high, and communed more with the swift fires of sunrise and the slow flames of sunset than with his fellows.

It was in his thirtieth year that Ian first spoke with Ethlenn; and that was the year when she and her widowed mother came to live at what was then the lonely clachan of Easter Creggans near Strachur. I am using the word meaningly: for though, as I say, it was then he first spoke with her, he had seen her three years earlier, though without knowledge of who she was. One day in late autumn he had gone with a friend as far as Ormidale of Loch Rid-

den, and having said farewell to his one intimate companion, who was on his way to a far land whence he would not come again, had walked along the steep hill-slopes to Tigh-na-bruaich in the Kyles of Bute, where he had the steamer that sailed the fifty or sixty miles' waterway to Inverary. On the boat, a small screw-steamer for cargo and local traffic, he saw a young girl whose beauty fascinated him. Well enough he knew who was the grey-haired man she was with, Robert Stuart of Fionnamar in Ardlamont; but because of the feud between this man and his own father, Ian McIan of Tighnacoille in Strachurmore, he could not break the silence. Sure, as old Dionaid said to me, it is for doubting if Ian would have spoken in any case; for he, the dreamer, had suddenly come upon his dream, had seen the face that haunted his visions by day and night; and that seeing, then and there, was enough for him. It was, indeed, characteristic of Ian Mòr that he made no inquiry concerning them, when a boat that had been hanging about in Inchmarnock Water, carried them away to the Ardlamont shore; and that from that day he made no effort to find if the beautiful girl were kith

monotony. The haunting air and words passed into his brain. Something awoke there; as the sea-wind, suddenly striking a loch, will awake echoes in remote corries on the hills.

Curious, because of a new strange lilt in the lines, and of a repressed intensity in the simple Gaelic words, he asked the singer whose was the song she sang. It was then that, for the first time, he heard of Ethlenn Stuart.

That summer they met. From the first they loved. No one could gainsay the beauty of Ethlenn, with her tall, lithe, slim figure, her dark-brown dusky hair, her gloaming eyes, her delicate features, with, above all, her radiant expression of joyous life. That many heads were shaken knowingly or warningly because of her, was nothing against the fair lass; only, there were few, probably there was none, who understood her. She saw little of the strath-folk, and when not at home with her invalid mother at the cot among the pines above Creggans, or upon the loch, was a wanderer upon the hills. There, in the fresh mornings, or in the drowsy afternoons, or in the prolonged hours of sundown, often she met Ian. More and more dear they grew to each other, till at last they

thing happened. All his youthful ambitions became wild swans, and he found himself with one abiding desire: to be a singer for his own people, his own race, in their own ancient language, — a tongue old and deep and mysterious as the mountain-wind or the sighing sea.

One day, not long after his father's death, he was near a summer-shealing on the upper slope of Ben Measach when he heard a girl singing an unfamiliar Gaelic song, as she lay in the heather watching the kye close upon the hour of the milking.

"Wave, wave, green branches, wave me far away
To where the forest deepens and the hill-winds, sleeping, stay, —
Where Peace doth fold her twilight wings, and through the heart of day
There goes the rumour of passing hours grown faint and grey.

"Wave, wave, green branches, my heart like a bird doth hover
Above the nesting-place your green-gloom shadows cover:
Oh, come to my nesting-heart, come close, come close, bend over,
Joy of my heart, my life, my prince, my lover!"

There is an incommunicable music in the long slow flow of the Gaelic song, and in its dreamy

monotony. The haunting air and words passed into his brain. Something awoke there; as the sea-wind, suddenly striking a loch, will awake echoes in remote corries on the hills.

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cared to have no other comrade than the hill-wind that whispered through the pines its message of joy, or the sunlight that came floodingly from over the mountains in the east, and ebbed in vast serenities of peace along the hill-crests beyond the narrow sea-loch. Many of her songs, many of his, were made at this time. This is the song of the "Daughter of the Sun" that he wrote to her out of his heart, and is sung to this day. In the original there is the swift flame, the consuming fire, the repressed passion which I find it impossible to convey. Whoso has heard this song of Ian Mòr, and thrilled in the heart-loud silence that follows it, sung, in the twilight or by the peats, by one who loves or has loved, only such an one can know it.—[1]

Thou art the Daughter of the Sun,
Alona!
Even as the sun in a green place,
The light that is upon thy face!
When thou art gone there is dusk on my ways,
Alona!

[1] Alona signifies "most beautiful" or "exquisitely beautiful," and is at the same time equivalent to "dear to me" or "dear of my heart."

Thy soul is of sun-fire wrought in clay,
Alona,
The white warm clay that hath for name
Alona, and for word of fame
Ethlenn, and is for me a Flame
To burn against the Eternal Day,
Alona!

The hills know thee, and the green woods,
Alona,
And the wide sea, and the blue loch, and the stream:
On thy brow, Daughter of the Sun, is agleam
The mystery of Dream, —
Alona!

The fires of the sun that burn thee,
Alona,
Oh, heart of my heart, are in me!
Thy fire burns, thy flame killeth, thy sea
Of light blazeth continually, —
Is there no rest in joy, no rest, no rest for me
Whom rapture slayeth utterly,
Alona, Alona!

It was on the eve of the day he made this song to Ethlenn, that he and she met among the pines upon the lower slopes of Maol-Láe-y-a-ghrian. He came upon her while she lay full length along the bole of a fallen pine. For a time he stood looking upon her. The sunlight,

flowing from above Ben Dearg and Am Buachaille on the west side of the loch, streamed upon her body as it lay dark against the red pine-bole, and lay upon her face in a glory. The voice of the wind among the trees was as the tide coming over smooth sands. The cuckoos were calling one to another; echo-like falling cadences coming back from the Wood of Claondiri on the opposite coast.

He hesitated to tell her what he had to say; above all, to break the spell. She was at one with nature, thus. The wind was her comrade, the pine-tree her brother; she herself a flower.

When he leaned forward and kissed her, he saw that her eyes were dreaming in the far depths above her. She smiled, opened her arms to him, but did not rise.

"Aluinn," she whispered, "Ian-à-ghray, Aluinn, Aluinn!"

For a long while they stayed thus in silence. They two and the wind; all the world fell away from these three.

At last Ian stirred.

"Come, Alona; come, Ethlenn-mûirnean," he whispered, with his lips against her ear, under the dusky, fragrant shadow of her hair.

Hand in hand, they passed beneath the pines, and out upon the heather. As they climbed Creag'-an-Eich, in the wonderful afterglow, though it was already less than two hours short of midnight, there were no other sounds than the deep wave-murmur of the flowing air amid the pine-trees now beyond them, and the crying of the lapwings. Even the ewes and lambs were still. At long intervals the clucking of grouse, or the churr of a fern-owl, rustled like eddies across the calm of the heather-sea.

When they reached the summit of Creag'-an-Eich, — to some known as Maol-Láe-y-a-ghrian, because of Ian's songs, — they stood for a while speechless.

Beneath them the land swam circling to the loch. Save in the shadow of the west, the water was like the melted ore of the Tuatha-de-Danann, suspended so in the flaming cauldrons under the mountains over against a day that shall come again. Beyond, hill-range after hill-range lay in long curves of shadowy amethyst deepening into purple. Over the most remote, three stars seemed to drop silver fire through the faint rose-glow which underlay the straits

of gold and crimson far-spreading into immeasurable lagoons of quiet light.

Behind them, where they stood hand in hand facing the light, were the mountains, purple-grey and grey-blue: vast buttressed heights rising sheer and isolate. Mass after mass, peak after peak, the mountain sanctuaries stood in their dim, mysterious majesty.

"Ethlenn-Alona," said Ian at last, but in a voice so low that the girl by his side just caught the words; "Ethlenn, we have already given all to each other, and have vowed the troth upon us through life. But now let us vow the troth of death also, for who is it that will be knowing when the dark hour is leaping through the noon or stealing through the night."

So it was there and thus they vowed their solemn troth that neither life nor death should come between them. The prayer that was in each heart rose, an invisible bird, and flew towards the slow-receding seas of light. The hill-wind carried their vows far and wide upon the mountains they loved.

Nor did they know, as with clasped hands they wandered down towards the pine-wood, that a shadow walked behind them, — one who

was like Ethlenn, tall and beautiful, but with her eyes wild and full of a despairing pain.

Now that I have gone thus far I should tell their story fully; but I cannot.

Here is what is for knowledge throughout the glens.

That night Ian told Ethlenn how he had received a mysterious letter from the distant southland city, London. It purported to be from his brother Hector, whose word was that he had departed suddenly into the south country, from Edinburgh, whither, as Ian knew, he had lately gone. The writing was in an unfamiliar hand. The message was to the effect that Hector was ill, dying; that he begged Ian to come to him at once; and that, on his arrival, he would be met by a friend, a Stralachlan man at that, who would take him straightway to the death-bed.

Well, it was the long way to London that Ian Mòr went. Was there never a hill, he wondered, after the Cumberland fells were left far behind, — was there never a hill in the poor land?

But all thoughts of this foreign England and

of the great city he was so eager to see, and yet was already weary of, went from him, when, at the station, he was met by Roderick Stuart, the cousin of Ethlenn.

What did it mean? What was the meaning of this thing? Why was Roderick Stuart in London, — he who was a small laird high up in Stralachlan of Lochfyne; he that was the lover of Ethlenn; he that had sworn to the undoing of Ian Mòr, and to the winning of his cousin Ethlenn after all?

The man came forward, with what smile upon his false lips could rise above a heart so black.

"No," said Ian simply; — "no, we will not be shaking hands, Roderick Mhic Aonghas. There is that between us of which there is no need to speak. Where will my brother be? If you will be so good as to tell me the way I will go to him alone."

Stuart laughed. "London is n't Inverary, Ian Mhic Ian; no, nor yet Greenock; no, nor yet even Glasgow. The place where your brother is, why it will be miles and miles from here. There is a cab here waiting for us. If you wish to see Hector McIan alive you must not be waiting here, talking of this and that."

In the long drive through the streets, so unspeakably sordid and dreary that Ian's heart bled for the wretched folk who had to live away from the quiet hills and the clean waters, he asked his companion many questions, but without any answer that gave him ease. Again, what was the meaning of Roderick Stuart being dressed as though he were a minister? True, he was a man with much money, so it was said; but why was he clad as though he were a minister? Was it a southland way?

So sure at last was he that he was being deceived, that he would have then and there parted with the man Stuart, had it not been that, at that moment, the cab swerved, passed through a gateway into a short narrow avenue, and came to a stop abruptly.

Almost immediately after they had entered the house, Stuart was called by a servant out of the room where they waited. When he came back, a minute or two later, it was with a tall, heavy-browed, sullen-eyed man.

"Ian," began Roderick Stuart familiarly, and with a smile as he noticed the angry look in Ian Mòr's eyes; "Ian, this is Dr. MacManus, of whom I have told you."

Ian made no answer, but looked from one to the other. The tall man turned to his companion:—

"Did you say he was an older or a younger brother of yours, Mr. Stuart?"

"Younger."

But here Ian Mòr spoke, frowning darkly.

"I do not know you, sir, and I do not know why I am in this house, if my brother Hector is not here. If he is, I am wishing to go to him at once. As for this man here, Roderick Stuart, he is no kith or kin to me. My name is Ian McIan, and I am of Tigh-na-coille in Strachurmore of Lochfyne."

But why should I delay in telling that which will already be guessed?

The man Stuart had prevailed with this Dr. MacManus, whether by craft or by bribery, or both; and there is no need to say more than that Ian Mòr found, too late, that he had been trapped into a private asylum.[1]

[1] I am not telling here the story of Ian Mòr. All who knew him, and many of those who love his songs, are familiar with the piteous record of the bitter wrong that was done to him and to Ethlenn Stuart. By a strange

In the months that followed no word was had of him. His brother Hector, who had not been ill at all, and had never gone south from Edinburgh, did all that he could; not only by inquiries in London, because of what Ethlenn had told him, but also of the steamship-companies, for Roderick Stuart of Dubh Chnoc in Stralachlan told him how he had met Ian in Glasgow, and how he, Ian, had informed him of his intent to sail to America and take to a new life there, under a new name. Hector believed so far, and indeed this story grew and was received. Only Ethlenn knew that

coincidence, the day of his abrupt release was the day before Ethlenn's death, — the day he left London for his return to the mountain-land for which, as for her, his heart was sick unto death. The death of Roderick Stuart had brought about his freedom; but here it is needless to go into details of all that happened before and after.

It was Ian Mòr himself who found her body, on the eve that followed the sunrise into which her life had lapsed, as a flower might give up its perfume. Nevertheless, I should add, the passion of his love while she lived, the passion of his love for her in death, had more to do with the strange dream-madness, or "ecstasy," of his after-years, than even the excruciating mental suffering which he endured through the villany of Roderick Stuart.

the man lied. She waited, with her heart in leash.

In the sixth month of silence Ethlenn's child was born. With joy and pain she spent long hours looking into its blue eyes, seeking there the clue to the strange and terrible mystery.

Ah, it is God only knows what she learned there; but one day she put the child hurriedly back to her breast, and strode swift through the pines to her home. Neither sorrow nor suffering had dimmed her beauty. She moved now as a Bandià, a mountain-goddess.

The child she left with a kinswoman, Mary MacNair, a young widow, who took the little one to her heart with sobbing joy, because of her own womb that had not borne and of the dead man whom she had loved.

Having done this, Ethlenn put off from Creggan shore in a boat. The breeze came down the loch, and she sailed swift southward. When opposite the Glen of Dubh Chnoc she landed. In less than an hour she was upon the high upland where Roderick Stuart had his home. The man was not there. He was up on the hill, she was told, — at the shealing of Farlan Macfarlane the shepherd.

When, at last, they met, it was by the Lochan-na-Mona, the deep, black tarn in the moorland.

They looked at each other in silence. Then a cruel smile came upon the man's face.

"It is too late that you are coming *now*, Ethlenn Stuart, — or is it Ethlenn McIan I should be saying?"

She took no notice of the sneer.

"I am Ethlenn McIan. Do you know why I have come?"

"Well, as for that, my lass — "

"I have come to kill you."

"You — *you!* Ah, by the black stone in Iona, is that so? Sure, it is terrified I ought to be!"

But suddenly all the surface courage of the man sank. He saw somewhat in Ethlenn's eyes which put the fear upon him.

She drew closer. The eyes in her death-pale face were like dark water-lilies afloat on wan water.

"I did not know in what way God would give you over into my hands, but now I know, Roderick Mhic Aonghas."

"I am innocent, Ethlenn Co-ogha — I did

not do it — besides, he — he — he is not dead — and — "

But with a spring she was upon him. He stumbled, fell, half-rose; with a swift whirl she swung him off his balance. The next moment he felt headlong, backward, into the deep pool.

Ethlenn stood for a moment, watching. Then she snatched the iron-shod staff he had dropped. If he rose, it must be to his death. But whether caught in the trailing weeds, or for some other reason not to be known, Roderick Stuart never rose. There, in time, his body was found; and the strathfolk said that he had fallen there, heavy with the drink that was always upon him of late, and had been drowned there in the dark and the silence.

Ethlenn waited by the tarn till, from its unrevealing depths, bubble after bubble ascended; waited till not the smallest air-bubble quivered upon the smooth blackness of the water; waited till the lapwings of the gloaming flew overhead, crying mournfully. Then, at last, she turned, and went down through the shadowy woods to the place where her boat was.

It was moonlight when, three hours later,

she opened the door of the cottage. Her mother was awake, and called to her.

"Have you had good news, Ethlenn, my bonnie?" she whispered, as she drew the beautiful face down to her own.

The girl stared at her questioningly.

"I am asking it, dear, because of the glad light that is in your eyes. Perhaps it is only a good deed that you have done?"

"Ay, mother dear, that is it. It is because of a good deed that I have done. But do not speak to me about it, now or later. I am glad, who can never be glad again till I see Ian face to face."

And from that day forth Ethlenn went to and fro as one in a dream. Some thought that her sorrow had crazed her; others that a lifelong melancholy had come to her out of her grief. Once only she was heard to laugh: when a farmer from Stralachlan urged her to write a monody on Roderick Stuart, whose untimely death had shocked the people of the strath.

More than ever she haunted the pinewood, the hills, or the loch. Often she was seen, singing low to her baby, or raising it on high to

catch the wind or the sun, calling the boy her Ian, her poet, her blossom of joy.

In the late heats she crossed often to the steep woodlands at the Ceann-More, on the opposite side of the loch. At one rocky headland, crowned with a solitary pine, she dreamed through long hours. It was here that she and Ian had spent one memorable golden day. Lying here, she could still feel his breath warm against her face, could almost feel his lips upon her own. Nearly all her last songs were made at this spot, Creagaleen.

So it was that, after many weeks, the steep, rocky, and densely wooded shore which ran between two promontories became known to the fisherfolk of Kenmore and Strachur as Ard-Ethlenn.

Only once did she take the child with her when she went to Creagaleen. It was on that day she made this song to Ian bàn, her little boy, her Ian who was of Ian. It is called, in the Gaelic, *The Two Ians.*

Are these your eyes, Ian,
That look into mine?
Is this smile, this laugh
Thine?

Heart of me, dear,
  O pulse of my heart,
This is our child, our child —
  And — we apart!

Wrought of thy life, Ian,
  Wrought in my womb,
Never to feel thy kiss! —
  Ah, bitter doom!

Live, live, thou laughing boy,
  We meet again!
Here do we part, we twain;
I to my death-sweet pain,
  Thou to thy span of joy.

Hush, hush; within thine eyes
  His eyes I see.
Sure, death is Paradise
If so my soul can be,
  Ian, with thee!

Here, too, were made some of those songs of passionate love which have never been collected, but linger only in the hearts of those who learned them long years ago. Two of these I have in the writing of Ian Mòr, who copied them for me from the original in "The Book of My Heart," as the small MS. volume was called which was found among Ethlenn's papers.

I.

His face was glad as dawn to me,
His breath was sweet as dusk to me,
His eyes were burning flames to me,
Shule, Shule, Shule, agràh!

The broad noon-day was night to me,
The full-moon night was dark to me,
The stars whirled and the poles span
The hour God took him far from me.

Perhaps he dreams in heaven now,
Perhaps he doth in worship bow,
A white flame round his foam-white brow
Shule, Shule, Shule, agràh!

I laugh to think of him like this,
Who once found all his joy and bliss
Against my heart, against my kiss,
Shule, Shule, Shule, agràh!

Star of my joy, art still the same
Now thou hast gotten a new name,
Pulse of my heart, my Blood, my Flame,
Shule, Shule, Shule, agràh!

II.

He laid his dear face next to mine,
His eyes aflame burned close to mine,
His heart to mine, his lips to mine,
Oh, he was mine, all mine, all mine.

Drunk with old wine of love I was,
Drunk as the wild-bee in the grass
Singing his honey-mad sweet bass,
Drunk, drunk with wine of love I was!

His lips of life to me were fief,
Before him I was but a leaf
Blown by the wind, a shaken leaf
Yea, as the sickle reaps the sheaf,
My Grief!
He reaped me as a gathered sheaf!

His to be gathered, his the bliss,
But not a greater bliss than *this!*
All of the empty world to miss
For wild redemption of his kiss!
My Grief!

For hell was lost, though heaven was brief
Sphered in the universe of thy kiss,—
So cries to thee thy fallen leaf,
Thy gathered sheaf,
Lord of my life, my Pride, my Chief,
My Grief!

It was midway in the heat-wave of a rainless September that, in Ian's words, the Daughter of the Sun "went away with the hill-wind through the green silences."

One evening she sailed across the loch, and

drifted slow with the tide through the green depths beneath Ard-Ethlenn. At Creagaleen she moored the boat, and climbed the bracken-covered boulders. Under the pine where she and Ian had first known the passion of their love, she lay down: strangely weary now. The moon rose over the Cowal, transmuting the velvety shadows on the hills into a fluid light. The lingering gloaming, the moonshine, pale stars to north and south, deep calms of shadow, one and all wrought the loch to the beauty of dream. Thus might the bride of Manànnan, she who was a lovely sea-loch, have seemed to him, when he came in from the ocean upon his chariot, the flowing tide.

To have loved supremely! After all, the green, sweet world had been good to her, its daughter. She had loved and been loved, with the passion of passion. Nothing in the world could take away that joy; not the death of Ian Mòr, — of which now there could be no longer any doubt; not sorrow by day and grief by night; not the mysterious powers themselves that men called God, and that moved and lived and had their blind will behind the blowing wind and the rising sap, behind the drifting

leaf and the granite hills, behind the womb of woman and the mind of man, behind the miracle of day and night, behind life, behind death.

It was hers, — all hers. To have known this wonderful happiness was in truth to be, as Ian had often called her, a Princess of the World. How gladly she would have lived through the long years with him, she thought; but, since that was not to be, how gladly she forfeited all else!

All that night she lay there, under the pine tree, listening to the lapping of the tide in the hollows and crevices beneath.

It was for peace, too, to know that she had killed Roderick Stuart. Perhaps Ian knew that his murderer lay in that black hill-tarn. That were well. She would have killed him, of course, whatever had happened; but it was better that he was delivered over to her, then, there, in that way. It was a good law: a life for a life. The minister said "No"; and the people echoed "No"; but in the human heart it was always "Yes." Ian was the tenderest human being — man, woman, or child — she had ever known; but, sure, he too would have

slain Roderick Mhic Aonghas; ay, sure, that was for the knowing. He would love her the better when they met again in the shadow of the grave, because of the deed she had done. Of old, no man or woman of heroic soul suffered the death-wrong to pass without the death-eric. And who are the blind sheep of to-day that follow new shepherds? Do they know any whit more than did the mountain-folk and the sea-farers in the days of old?

Towards dawn the tide was on the ebb. Ethlenn knew that it was ebb-tide also in her life.

At sunrise she rose, stretched out her arms, and called *Ian* thrice. She heard the gulls and skuas crying upon the weedy promontories; on the loch the mackerel-shoals made a rustling noise; the hill-wind sang a far-off song: but no answer came from him whom she called.

The sunlight was about her like a garment: as a consuming flame, rather, it was within her and around her.

Her eyes filled with light; her body thrilled. Slowly she turned. A smile came upon her face. She stooped, kneeled, and lay down in the green-gold gloom beneath the pine.

"Ian!" she whispered; "Ian, Aluinn, my Poet, my Mountain-Lover, Ian, Ian!"

For it was Death that lay there, waiting comradely; but he had come in the guise of Ian Mòr.

The Birdeen.

Some other time I will tell the story of Isla and Morag McIan: Isla that was the foster-brother and chief friend of Ian McIan the mountain-poet, known as Ian of the Hills, or simply as Ian Mòr, because of his great height and the tireless strength that was his. Of Morag, too, there is a story of the Straths, sweet as honey of the heather, and glad as the breeze that, blowing across it in summer, waves the purple into white-o'-the-wind and sea-change amethyst.

Isla was seven years older than Ian Mòr, and had been seven years married to Morag, when the sorrow of their friend's life came upon him. Of that matter I speak elsewhere.

They were happy, Isla and Morag. Though both were of Strachurmore of Loch Fyne, they lived at a small hill-farm on the west side of the

upper fjord of Loch Long, and within sight of Arrochar, where it sits among its mountains. They could not see the fantastic outline of "The Cobbler," because of a near hill that shut them off, though from the loch it was visible and almost upon them. But they could watch the mists on Ben Arthur and Ben Maiseach, and when a flying drift of mackerel-sky spread upward from Ben Lomond, that was but a few miles eastward as the crow flies, they could tell of the good weather that was sure.

Before the end of the first year of their marriage, deep happiness came to them. "The Birdeen" was their noon of joy. When the child came, Morag had one regret only, that a boy was not hers, for she longed to see Isla in the child that was his. But Isla was glad, for now he had two dreams in his life: Morag whom he loved more and more, and the little one whom she had borne to him, and was for him a mystery and joy against the dark hours of the dark days that must be.

They named her Eilidh. One night, in front of the peats, and before her time was come, Morag, sitting with Isla and Ian Mòr, dreamed of the birthing. It was dark, save for the warm

redness of the peat-glow. There was no other light, and in the dusky corners the obscure velvety things that we call shadows moved and had their own life and were glad. Outside, the hill-wind was still at last, after a long wandering moaning that had not ceased since its westering, for, like a wailing hound, it had followed the sun all day. A soft rain fell. The sound of it was for peace.

Isla sat forward, his chin in his hands and his elbows on his knees. He was dreaming, too. "Morag," "Isla," deep love, deep mystery, the child that was already here, and would soon be against the breast; these were the circuit of his thoughts. Sure, Morag, sweet and dear as she was, was now more dear, more sweet. "Green life to her," he murmured below his breath, "and in her heart, joy by day and peace by night."

Ian sat in the shadow of the ingle, and looked now at one and now at the other, and then may-hap into the peat-flame or among the shadows. He saw what he saw. Who knows what is in a poet's mind? The echo of the wind that was gone was there, and the sound of the rain and the movement and colour of the fire, and some-

thing out of the earth and sea and sky, and great pitifulness and tenderness for women and children, and love of men and of birds and beasts, and of the green lives that were to him not less wonderful and intimate. And Ian, thinking, knew that the thoughts of Isla and Morag were drifting through his mind too; so that he smiled with his eyes because of the longing and joy in the life of the man, his friend; and looked through a mist of unshed tears at Morag, because of the other longing that shone in her eyes, and of the thinness of the hands now, and of the coming and going of the breath like a bird tired after a long flight. He was troubled, too, with the fear and the wonder that came to him out of the hidden glooms of her soul.

It was Ian who broke the stillness, though for sure his low words were parts of the peat-rustle and the dripping rain and the wash of the sea-loch, where it twisted like a black adder among the hills, and was now quick with the tide.

"But if the birdeen be after you, Morag, and not after Isla, what will you be for calling it?"

Morag started, glanced at him with her flame-lit eyes, and flushed. Then, with a low laugh, her whispered answer came.

"Now it is a true thing, Ian, that you are a wizard. Isla has often said that you can hear the wooing of the trees and the flowers, but sure I 'm thinking you could hear the very stones speak, or at least know what is in their hearts. How did you guess that was the thought I was having?"

"It was for the knowing, lassikin."

"Ian, it is a wife you should have, and a child upon your knee to put its lips against yours, and to make your heart melt because of its little wandering hands."

Ian made no sign, though his pulse leaped, for this was ever the longing that lay waiting behind heart and brain, and thrilled each along the wise, knowing nerves, — our wise nerves that were attuned long, long ago, and play to us a march against the light, or down into the dark, and we unwitting, and not knowing the ancient rune of the heritage that the blood sings, an ancient, ancient song. Who plays the tune to which our dancing feet are led? It is behind the mist, that antique strain to which the hills rose in flame and marl, and froze slowly into granite silence, and to which the soul of man crept from the things of the slime to the palaces

of the brain. It is for the hearing, that; in the shells of the human. Who knows the under-song of the tides in the obscure avenues of the sea? Who knows the old immemorial tidal-murmur along the nerves, — along the nerves even of a new-born child?

Seeing that he was silent, Morag added: "Ay, Ian dear, it is a wife and a child you must have. Sure no man that has all the loving little names you give to us can do without us!"

"Well, well, Morag-aghray, the hour waits, as they say out in the isles. But you have not given me the answer to what I asked?"

"And it is no answer that I have. Isla! — Isla, if a girl it is to be, you would be for liking the little one to be called Morag, because of me; but that I would not like; no, no, I would not. Is it forgetting, you are, what old Muim' Mary said, that a third Morag in line, like a third Sheumais, would be born in the shadow, would have the gloom?"

"For sure, *muirnean;* it is not you or I that would forget that thing. Well, since there 's Morag that was your mother, and Morag that is you, there can be no third. But it is the same with Muireall that was the name of my mother

and of the mother before her. See here now, dear, let Ian have the naming, if a girl it be, — for all three of us know that, if a boy it is, his name will be Ian. So now, *mo-charaid*, what is the name that will be upon the wean?"

"*Wean*," repeated Ian, puzzled for a moment because of the unfamiliar word in the Gaelic, "ah sure, yes: well, but it is Morag who knows best."

"No, no, Ian. The naming is to be with you. What names of women do you love best?"

"Morag."

"Ah, you know well that is not a true thing, but only a saying for the saying. Tell me true; what name do you love best?"

"Mona I like, and Lora, and Silis too; and of the old, old names, it 's Brighid I am loving, and, too, Dearduil (*Darthula*) and Malmhin (*Malveen*); but of all names dear to me, and sweet in my ears, it is Eilidh (*Ei'-lee*)."

And so it was. When, in the third week after that night, the child was born, and a woman-child at that, it was called Eilidh. But the first thing that Ian said when he entered the house after the birthing was, —

"How is the birdeen?"

And from that day Eilidh was "the Birdeen," oftenest, — even with Isla and Morag.

Of the many songs that Ian made to Eilidh here is one: —

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, dear to me, dear and sweet,
In dreams I am hearing the noise of your little running feet, —
The noise of your running feet that like the sea-hoofs beat
A music by day and night, Eilidh, on the sands of my heart, my Sweet!

Eilidh, blue i' the eyes, as all babe-children are,
And white as the canna that blows with the hill-breast wind afar,
Whose is the light in thine eyes, the light of a star, a star
That sitteth supreme where the starry lights of heaven a glory are!

Eilidh, Eilidh, Eilidh, put off your wee hands from the heart o' me,
It is pain they are making there, where no more pain should be;
For little running feet, an' wee white hands, an' croodlin, as of the sea,
Bring tears to my eyes, Eilidh, tears, tears, out of the heart o' me —

Mo lennav-a-chree,
Mo lennav-a-chree!

This was for himself, and because of what was in his heart. But he made songs to the Birdeen herself. Some were as simple-mysterious as a wayside flower; others were strange, and with a note in them that all who know the Songs of Ian will recognise. Here is one: —

Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo,
Who is it swinging you to and fro,
With a long low swing and a sweet low croon,
And the loving words of the mother's rune?

Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo,
Who is it swinging you to and fro?
I 'm thinking it is an angel fair,
The Angel that looks on the gulf from the lowest stair
And swings the green world upward by its leagues of sunshine-hair.

Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo,
Who is it swings you and the Angel to and fro?
It is He whose faintest thought is a world afar,
It is He whose wish is a leaping seven-moon'd star,
It is He, Lennavan-mo,
To whom you and I and all things flow.

Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo,

It is only a little wee lass you are, Eilidh-mo-chree,
But as this wee blossom has roots in the depths of the sky,
So you are at one with the Lord of Eternity, —
Bonnie wee lass that you are,
My morning-star,
Eilidh-mo-chree, Lennavan-mo,
Lennavan-mo!

Once more let me give a song of his, this time also, like "Leanabhan-Mo," of those written while Eilidh was still a breast-babe.

Eilidh, Eilidh,
My bonnie wee lass;
The winds blow
And the hours pass.

But never a wind
Can do thee wrong,
Brown Birdeen, singing
Thy bird-heart song.

And never an hour
But has for thee
Blue of the heaven
And green of the sea, —

Blue for the hope of thee,
Eilidh, Eilidh;
Green for the joy of thee,
Eilidh, Eilidh.

Swing in thy nest, then,
Here on my heart,
Birdeen, Birdeen,
Here on my heart,
Here on my heart!

But Eilidh was "the Birdeen" not only when she could be tossed high in the air in Ian's strong arms, or could toddle to him from *claar* to stool and from stool to chair; not only when she could go long walks with him upon the hills above Loch Long; but when, as a grown lass of twenty, she was so fair to see that the countryside smiled when it saw her, as at the first sunflood swallow, or as at the first calling across dewy meadows of the cuckoo after long days of gloom.

She was tall and slim, with a flower-like way with her: the way of the flower in the sunlight, of the wave on the sea, of the tree-top in the wind. Her changing hazel eyes, now grey-green, now dusked with sea-gloom or a violet shadowiness; her wonderful arched eyebrows, dark so that they seemed black; the beautiful bonnie face of her, with her mobile mouth and white flawless teeth; the ears that lay against the tangle of her sun-brown shadowy hair, like

pink shells on a drift of seaweed; the exquisite poise of head and neck and body: are not all these things to be read of her in the poems of Ian Mòr? Her voice, too, was sweet against the ears as the singing of hillside burns. But most she was loved for this: that she was ever fresh as the dawn, young as the morning, and alive in every fibre with the joy of life. The old dreamed they were young again, when she was with them; the weary opened their hearts, because she was sunshine; the young were glad and believed that all things might be. Who can tell the many names of the Birdeen? She was called Sunshine, Sunbeam, Way o' the Wind, and a score more of lovely and endearing names. But to every one there was one name that was common, the Birdeen.

"What has she done to be so famous, both through Ian Mòr and others," was often said of her when, in later years, the first few threads of grey streaked the bonnie hair that was her pride. What has she done, this Eilidh, save what other women do? Ah, well, it is not Eilidh's story I am telling; and she living yet, and like to live till the young heart of her is still at last. It will be the going of a sunbeam, that.

But this is for the knowing, and, sure, can be said. She loved the green world with a deep enduring love. Earth, sea, and sky were comradely with her, as with few men and fewer women. And she loved men and women and children just as Ian Mòr loved them, and that was a way not far from the loving way that the Son of Man had, for it was tender and true and heeding little the evil, but rejoicing with laughter and tears over the good. Then, too, there is this: she loved the man to whom she gave herself, with deep passion, that was warm against all chill of change and time and death itself. How few of whom even this much can be said? For deep passion is rare, so rare that men have debased the flawless image to the service of a base coinage. She gave him love, and passion, and the longing of her woman's heart; and she was the flame that was in his brain, for he, too, like Ian Mòr, was a poet and dreamer. Then, after having given joy and strength and the flower of her life, so that he had the brain and the heart of two lives, she gave him the supreme gift she had for the giving, and that was their child, that is called Aluinn because of his beauty, and is now the poet of a new day.

When she was married to the man whose love

for her was almost worship, Ian Mòr said this to him: "Be proud, for she who has filled you with deep meanings and new powers, is herself a proud Queen in whose service you must either live or die with joy."

And to Eilidh herself he said, in a written word he gave her to take away with her: "Rhythms of the music of love for your brain, white-wing'd thoughts for the avenues of your heart, and the song of the White Merle be there!" And the Birdeen was glad at that, for she knew Ian, and all that he meant, and she would rather have had that word than any treasure of men.

To me, long years afterward, he said this: "I have known two women that were of the old race of the Tuatha De-Danann. They were as one, though she with whom my life rose and my life went was Ethlenn, and the other was Eilidh, the Birdeen at whose birthing I was, and who is comrade and friend to me, more than any man has been or any woman. Of each, this is my word: 'A woman beautiful, to be loved, honoured, revered, ay, scarce this side idolatry; but no weakling; made of heroic stuff, of elemental passions; strong to endure, but strong also to conquer and maintain.'"

Of what one who must be nameless wrote to her I have no right to speak, but here is one verse from his "Song of my Heart," ill-clad by me in this cold English out of the tender Gaelic that has won him the name "Mouth o' Honey." It is in prose I must give it, for I can find or make no rhythm to catch that strange sea-cadence of his: —

"Come to my life that is already yours, and at one with you:
Come to my blood that leaps because of you,
Come to my heart that holds you, Eilidh,
Come to my heart that holds you as the green earth clasps and holds the sunlight,
Come to me! Come to me, Eilidh!"

But still — but still — "What has she done, this Eilidh, save what other women do?"

Sure, you must ask this elsewhere than of me. I know no reason for it other than what I have said. She was, and is, "the Birdeen." "Green life to her, green song to her, green joy to her," the old wish of Ian at her naming, has been fulfilled indeed. Why, for that matter, should she be called "the Birdeen"? There are other women as fair to see, as sweet and true, as dear to men and women. Why? Sure, for that, why was Helen, Helen; or Cleopatra,

Cleopatra; or Deirdrê, Deirdrê? And, too, why does the common familiar bow that is set in the heavens thrill us in each new apparition as though it were a sudden stairway to all lost or dreamed-of Edens? As I write I look seaward, and over Innisdûn, the dark precipitous isle that lies in these wide waters even as Leviathan itself, a rainbow rises with vast unbroken sweep, a skyey flower fed from the innumerous hues of sunset woven this way and that on the looms of the sea. And I know that I have never seen a rainbow before, and of all that I may see I may never see another again as I have seen this. Yet it is a rainbow as others are, and have been and will be for all time past and to come.

Eilidh, that was "the Birdeen" when she laughed at the breast, and was "the Birdeen" when her own Aluinn first turned his father's eyes upon her, and is "the Birdeen" now when the white flower of age is belied by the young eyes and the young, young heart, — Eilidh that I love, Eilidh that has the lilt of life in her brain as no woman I have known or heard of has ever had in like measure, Eilidh is my Rainbow.

Silk o' the Kine.[1]

"What I shall now be telling you," said Ian Mòr to me once, — and indeed, I should remember the time of it well, for it was in the last year of his life, when rarely any other than myself saw aught of Ian of the Hills. —"What I shall now be telling you is an ancient forgotten tale of a man and woman of the old heroic days. The name of the man was Isla, and the name of the woman was Eilidh."

[1] *Silk o' the Kine*, one of the poetic "secret" names of conquered Erin, was in ancient days, there and in the Scottish Isles, a designation for a woman of rare beauty. The name Eilidh (pronounced *Eilʹih*, or *Isle-ee* with a long accent on the first syllable) is also ancient, but lingers in the Isles still, and indeed throughout the Western Highlands, as also, I understand, in Connaught and Connemara. Somhairle (Somerled) is pronounced *So-irl-ā*.

"Ah yes, for sure," Ian added, as I interrupted him; "I knew you would be saying that; but it is not of Eilidh that loved Cormac that I am now speaking. Nor am I taking the hidden way with Isla, that was my friend, nor with Eilidh that is my name-child, whom you know. Let the Birdeen be, bless her bonnie heart! No, what I am for telling you is all as new to you as the green grass to a lambkin; and no one has heard it from these tired lips o' mine since I was a boy, and learned it off the mouth of old Barabol MacAodh, that was my foster-mother."

Of all the many tales of the olden time that Ian Mòr told me, and are to be found in no book, this was the last. That is why I give it here, where I have spoken much of him.

Ian told me this thing one winter night, while we sat before the peats, where the ingle was full of warm shadows. We were in the croft of the small hill-farm of Glenivore, which was held by my cousin, Silis Macfarlane. But we were alone then, for Silis was over at the far end of the Strath, because of the baffling against death of her dearest friend, Giorsal MacDiarmid.

It was warm there, before the peats, with a thick wedge of spruce driven into the heart of them. The resin crackled and sent blue sparks of flame up through the red and yellow tongues that licked the sooty chimney-slopes, in which, as in a shell, we could hear an endless soughing of the wind.

Outside, the snow lay deep. It was so hard on the surface that the white hares, leaping across it, went soundless as shadows, and as trackless.

In the far-off days, when Somhairle was Maormor of the Isles, the most beautiful woman of her time was named Eilidh.

The king had sworn that whosoever was his best man in battle, when next the Fomorian pirates out of the north came down upon the isles, should have Eilidh to wife.

Eilidh, who, because of her soft, white beauty, for all the burning brown of her by the sun and wind, was also called Silk o' the Kine, laughed low when she heard this. For she loved the one man in all the world for her, and that was Isla, the son of Isla Mòr, the blind chief of Islay. He, too, loved her even as she loved him. He

was a poet as well as a warrior, and scarce she knew whether she loved best the fire in his eyes when, girt with his gleaming weapons and with his fair hair unbound, he went forth to battle: or the shine in his eyes when, harp in hand, he chanted of the great deeds of old, or made a sweet song to her, Eilidh, his queen of women; or the flame in his eyes when, meeting her at the setting of the sun, he stood speechless, wrought to silence because of his worshipping love of her.

One day she bade him go to the Isle of the Swans to fetch her enough of the breast-down of the wild cygnets for her to make a white cloak of. While he was still absent — and the going there, and the faring thereupon, and the returning took three days — the Fomorians came down upon the Long Island.

It was a hard fight that was fought, but at last the Norlanders were driven back with slaughter. Somhairle, the Maormor, was all but slain in that fight, and the corbies would have had his eyes had it not been for Osra Mac Osra, who with his javelin slew the spearman who had waylaid the king while he slipped in the Fomorian blood he had spilt.

While the ale was being drunk out of the great horns that night, Somhairle called for Eilidh.

The girl came to the rath where the king and his warriors feasted, white and beautiful as moonlight among turbulent, black waves.

A murmur went up from many bearded lips. The king scowled. Then there was silence.

"I am here, O King," said Eilidh. The sweet voice of her was like soft rain in the woods at the time of the greening.

Somhairle looked at her. Sure, she was fair to see. No wonder men called her Silk o' the Kine. His pulse beat against the stormy tide in his veins. Then, suddenly, his gaze fell upon Osra. The heart of his kinsman that had saved him was his own; and he smiled, and lusted after Eilidh no more.

"Eilidh, that art called Silk o' the Kine, dost thou see this man here before me?"

"I see the man."

"Let the name of him, then, be upon your lips."

"It is Osra Mac Osra."

"It is this Osra and no other man that is to wind thee, fair Silk o' the Kine. And by the

forward till he was nigh upon the Maormor. Then he waited.

"Well, Isla that is called Isla-Aluinn, Isla fair-to-see, what is the thing you want of me, that you stand there, close-kin to death I am warning you?"

"I want Eilidh that is called Silk o' the Kine."

"Eilidh is the wife of another man."

"There is no other man, O King."

"A brave word that! And who says it, O Isla my over-lord?"

"I say it."

Somhairle, the great Maormor, laughed, and his laugh was like a black bird of omen let loose against a night of storm.

"And what of Eilidh?"

"Let her speak."

With that the Maormor turned to the girl, who did not quail.

"Speak, Silk o' the Kine!"

"There is no other man, O King."

"Fool, I have this moment wedded you and Osra Mac Osra."

"I am wife to Isla-Aluinn."

"Thou canst not be wife to two men!"

"That may be, O King. I know not. But I am wife to Isla-Aluinn."

The king scowled darkly. None at the board whispered even. Osra shifted uneasily, clasping his sword-hilt. Isla stood, his eyes ashine as they rested on Eilidh. He knew nothing in life or death could come between them.

"Art thou not still a maid, Eilidh?" Somhairle asked at last.

"No."

"Shame to thee, wanton."

The girl smiled. But in her eyes, darkened now, there shone a flame.

"Is Isla-Aluinn the man?"

"He is the man."

With that the king laughed a bitter laugh.

"Seize him!" he cried.

But Isla made no movement. So those who were about to bind him stood by, ready with naked swords.

"Take up your harp," said Somhairle.

Isla stooped, and lifted the harp.

"Play now the wedding song of Osra Mac Osra and Eilidh Silk o' the Kine."

Isla smiled, but it was a grim smile that, and only Eilidh understood. Then he struck the

same token, I have sworn to him that he shall lie breast to breast with thee this night. So go hence to where Osra has his sleeping-place, and await him there upon the deer-skins. From this hour thou art his wife. It is said."

Then a silence fell again upon all there, when, after a loud surf of babbling laughter and talk, they saw that Eilidh stood where she was, heedless of the king's word.

Somhairle gloomed. The great black eyes under his cloudy mass of hair flamed upon her.

"Is it dumb you are, Eilidh," he said at last, in a cold, hard voice. "Or do you wait for Osra to take you hence?"

"I am listening," she answered, and that whisper was heard by all there. It was as the wind in the heather, low and sweet.

Then all listened.

The playing of a harp was heard. None played like that, save Isla Mac Isla Mòr.

Then the deer-skins were drawn aside, and Isla came among those who feasted there.

"Welcome, O thou who wast afar off when the foe came," began Somhairle, with bitter mocking.

But Isla took no note of that. He went

harp, and he sang thus far this song out of his heart to the woman he loved better than life.

Eilidh, Eilidh, heart of my life, my pulse, my flame,
There are two men loving thee, and two who are calling thee wife!

But only one husband to thee, Eilidh, that art my wife and my joy;
Ay, sure thy womb knows me and the child thou bearest is mine.

Thou to me, I to thee, there is nought else in the world, Eilidh, Silk o' the Kine, —
Nought else in the world, no, no other man for thee, no woman for me!

But with that Somhairle rose, and dashed the hilt of his great spear upon the ground.

"Let the twain go," he shouted.

Then all stood or leaned back, as Isla and Eilidh slowly moved through their midst, hand in hand. Not one there but knew they went to their death.

"This night shall be theirs," cried the king with mocking wrath. "Then, Osra, you can have your will of Silk o' the Kine that is your wife, and have Isla-Aluinn to be your slave, — and this for the rising and setting of three

moons from to-night. Then they shall each be blinded and made dumb, and that for the same space of time. And at the end of that time they shall be thrown upon the snow to the wolves."

Nevertheless Osra groaned in his heart because of that night of Isla with Eilidh. Not all the years of the years could give him a joy like unto that.

In the silence of the mid-dark he went stealthily to where the twain lay.

It was there he was found in the morning, where he had died soundlessly, with Eilidh's dagger up to the hilt in his heart.

But none saw them go, save one; and that was Sorch the brother of Isla, Sorch who in later days was called Sorch Mouth o' Honey because of his sweet songs. Of all songs that he sang none was so sweet against the ears as that of the love of Eilidh and Isla. Two lovers these that loved as few love; and deathless, too, because of that great love.

And what Sorch saw was this. Just before the rising of the sun, Isla and Eilidh came hand in hand from out of the rath, where they had lain awake all night because of their deep joy.

Silently, but unhasting, fearless still as of yore, they moved across the low dunes that withheld the sea from the land.

The waves were just frothed, so low were they. The loud glad singing of them filled the morning. Eilidh and Isla stopped when the first waves met their feet. They cast their raiment from them. Eilidh flung the gold fillet of her dusky hair far into the sea. Isla broke his sword, and saw the two halves shelve through the moving greenness. Then they turned, and kissed each other upon the lips.

And the end of the song of Sorch is this: that neither he nor any man knows whether they went to life or to death; but that Isla and Eilidh swam out together against the sun, and were seen never again by any of their kin or race. Two strong swimmers were these, who swam out together into the sunlight: Eilidh and Isla.

THE END.

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